9 MILLION SUFFOLK RECORDS GO ONLINE

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 235 OCTOBER 2025 £5.75

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®

PUBS AND PUBLICANS
FIND RECORDS ONLINE

FIND YOUR RAILWAY ANCESTORS

200 years since the first passenger train, we celebrate how rail travel changed Britain

PROVING FAMILY LEGENDS Learn how the professionals uncover royal links

Mary, covered in blood, claimed John had tried to 'murder them all'

EQUITY COURT REVELATIONS The hidden gem full of family clues

POSTAL WORKERS Explore online records

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- Harvest traditions
- Legacy 10's research wizard
- Explore your Essex roots

This was Sylvia's promise to you...

A generation ago, a woman named Sylvia made a promise. As a doctor's secretary, she'd watched stroke destroy the lives of so many people. She was determined to make sure we could all live in a world where we're far less likely to lose our lives to stroke.

She kept her promise, and a gift to the Stroke Association was included in her Will. Sylvia's gift helped fund the work that made sure many more of us survive stroke now than did in her lifetime.

Sylvia changed the story for us all. Now it's our turn to change the story for those who'll come after us.

Stroke still shatters lives and tears families apart. And surviving a stroke is just the start of a long and gruelling recovery journey. If you or someone you love has been affected by stroke – you'll know just what that means.

You can change the story, just like Sylvia did, with a gift in your Will. All it takes is a promise.

You can promise future generations a world where researchers discover new treatments and surgeries, and stroke survivors and their families have the support to find the strength and determination they need to find their way back to life.

Your promise today gives strength for tomorrow. Please, leave a gift in your Will to the Stroke Association.

Find out how by calling 020 7566 1505 or email legacy@stroke.org.uk or visit stroke.org.uk/legacy

Finding **strength** through **support**

Stroke Association

The Stroke Association is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789). Also registered in the Isle of Man (No. 945) and Jersey (NPO 369), and operating as a charity in Northern Ireland.

Welcome

Sarah's Top Tip

Read parish register entries with care, they may reveal more than you expect

Steve Thomas' answer to Jake Sanders' question ('Q&A', **page 47**) is a masterclass in reading all the clues on the page of a record. Jake wanted to know why the name of the mother wasn't included in the baptism record of his ancestor Charles Shelley. By looking at the parish register carefully, Steve opened up a Pandora's box of answers (and more questions). Jake assumed that Charles' mother was Ann, as he thought that he had found the right marriage record, but Steve showed that actually his mother was Lydia who died in childbirth. A tragic story uncovered by some expert insight.

When I was a child we had no car, so all of our holidays involved travel by train (nobody I knew flew anywhere). We would pack up a large trunk, and the railway service would pick it up and deliver it to my grandparents in Suffolk. The last train would have individual compartments. which felt old-fashioned even then. This month marks the 200th anniversary of passenger rail travel, and on **page 14** we remember the railway workers who toiled behind the scenes, and offer advice for discovering more about their lives through surviving records.

The Post Office was another huge employer with a similarly vast array of records; turn to **page 38** to find out more. However, most employment records have been lost, so it's great to see that Guinness kept its staff records and is now sharing them online (see **page 35**).

And if you have ever struggled to prove a family legend, turn to **page 21** to see how professional genealogists approach the problem when a client says that they think they have links to royalty.

Finally, I was delighted that Suffolk's parish registers have come online (**page 10**). The first thing I did was look up my grandparents' marriage record, and I was quickly on the phone to my mum. "Why does it say one of the witnesses was Cathrew Bishop of Nyasaland?" I asked. "Oh, it's an interesting story," she replied… enjoy the issue!

Sarah

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Contributors

Dr Mike Esbester
A senior lecturer at the University of Portsmouth, Mike co-leads the Railway Work, Life & Death project and on **page 14** talks about life working for the railways.

Joanne Penn
As a professional genealogist, Joanne has helped prove (and disprove) many family myths and legends over the years. On **page 21** she shares some tips on how she does it.

Susannah Coster
Susannah is an archivist at The Postal Museum in London, where she helps family historians explore the vast collection of records it holds. Read more on **page 38**.

COVER IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES/A PORTER AT MARYLEBONE STATION, c1900

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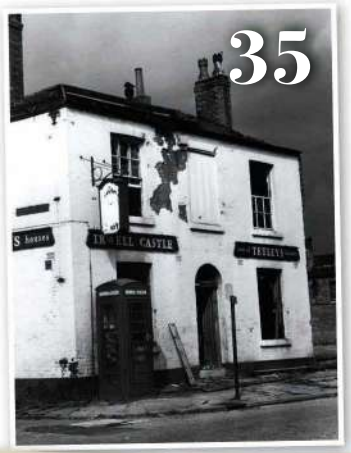

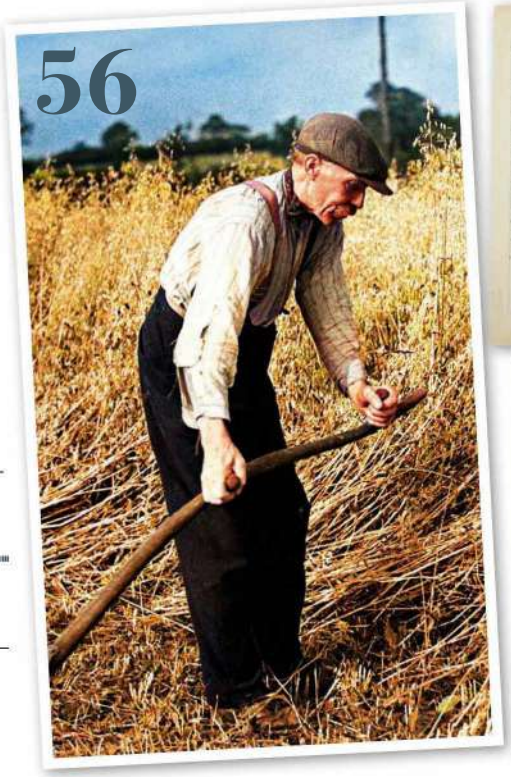

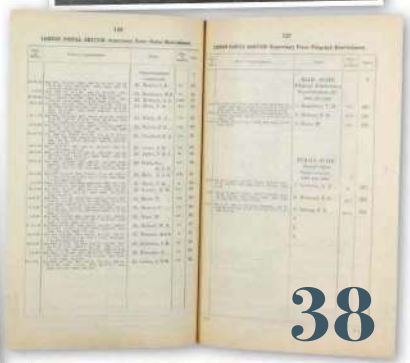

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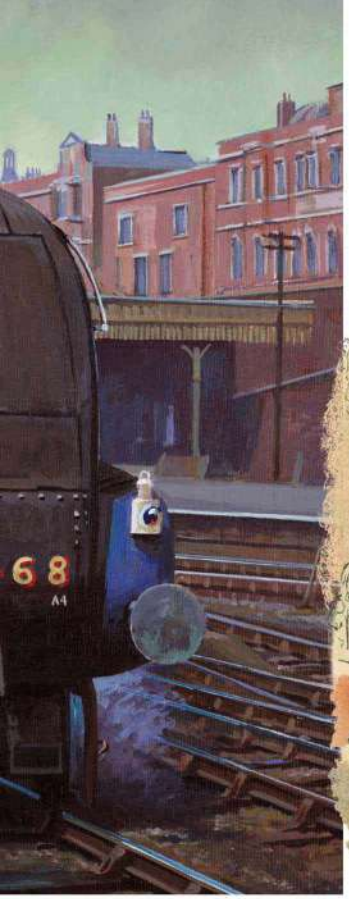

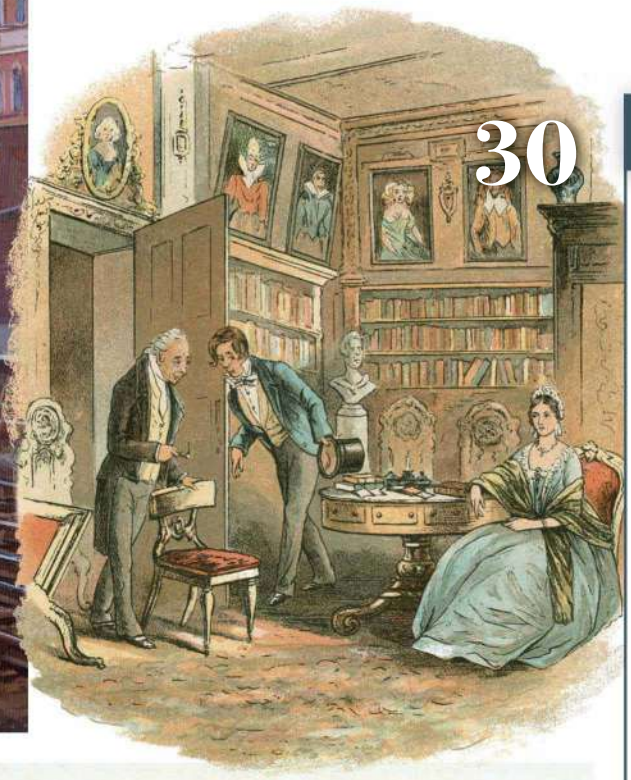

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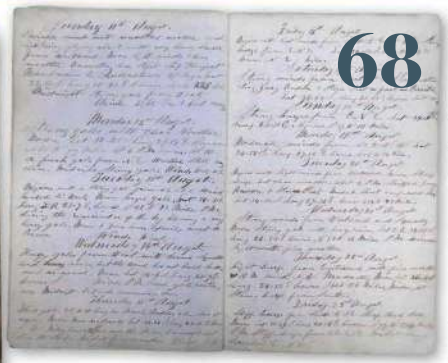

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A Very Cruel Childhood

STAR LETTER

Recently, at the Western Cape Archives in Cape Town, South Africa, I had to suppress my tears as I finally read the horrifying details about my late mother's tragically cruel early childhood.

Iris Aletta Maria Carver, née van der Sandt, barely remembered her parents Jacob and Violet, believing that they both perished in Cape Town during the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic when she was six. She often narrated tales of her subsequent life on an Afrikaner farm, where she and her brother Charles were sent.

Treated as farm and domestic slaves with no schooling and living in the most basic accommodation, their lives were miserable. When Mum was about 13, the teenage siblings escaped to search for and then live with their English grandmother's sister and husband in Cape Town.

I first visited the archive in 2001 armed with two references pertaining to Mum's "apprenticeship". I learnt the records were closed until 2020, but I did find records confirming my grandmother's death, but not my grandfather's. I later found a possible death in 1920, but was not convinced: he was described as "coloured" and buried in the "coloured" cemetery away from his wife.

A local researcher accessed the records for me in 2020. However, they told me that one of the files was empty and the other contained only a single sheet detailing the name and place where Mum was sent.

Over the past few years I have built a comprehensive tree of my Afrikaner ancestors, with three lines going back to the original Dutch settlers, using FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) and Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), confirmed in most cases by DNA matches. Another visit to South Africa was overdue, and in May I entered the archive.

Naturally, the two original files were my first requests. One did contain a single sheet. But the other had nine sheets of details compiled by the authorities in 1920.

The Child Protection Agency alerted the magistrate that Mum, then aged eight, was a servant for a bedridden and diseased European lady, Mrs Jones, for whom she does "the whole of the work and the washing of the clothes and is frequently in the street at 10pm". The magistrate ordered the police to investigate.

The subsequent report stated that Mum was "off coloured and would almost pass as European", "had not attended school for the last 10 months" and "slept on a mattress on the floor". Furthermore "there is not the slightest doubt the child is kept to do the housework" and "should be removed".

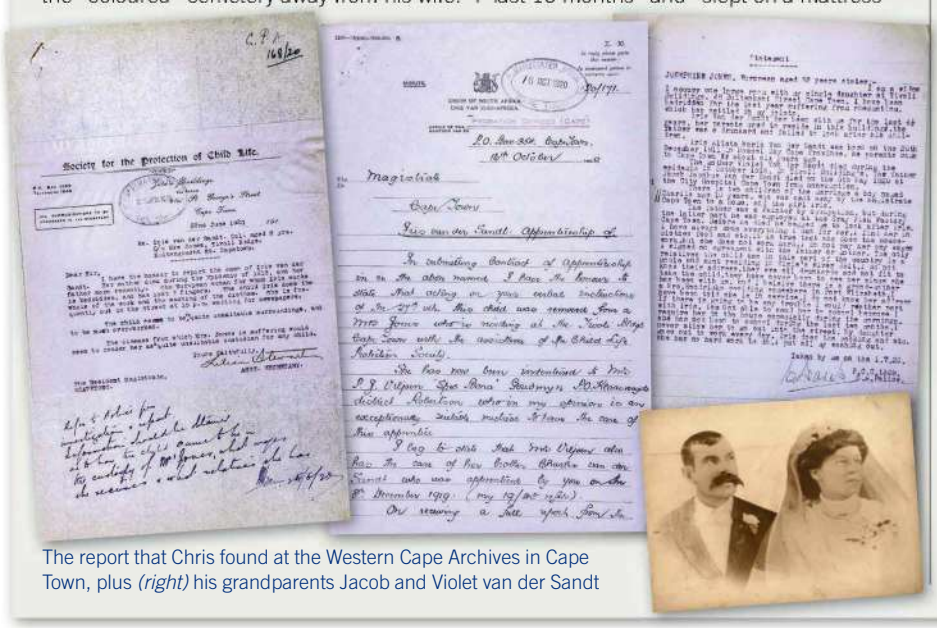
Iris Carver on her wedding day

Mrs Jones stated that she had been looking after Mum for four years at the request of her parents, as her father was a habitual drunkard. She also confirmed that the 1920 death notice was in fact correct.

Given these details, the magistrate arranged an apprenticeship on the farm. Undoubtedly it was out of the frying pan and into the fire! I was shocked to learn that in 1920 British-ruled South Africa, "coloureds" were treated badly by both Europeans and Afrikaners. And as to being "coloured", my DNA shows 1 per cent Bengal and 2 per cent Hoi/San.

Despite their childhood, both Mum and her brother taught themselves to read and write, lead happy and productive lives and were loving parents and grandparents.

Chris Carver, Caistor, Lincolnshire

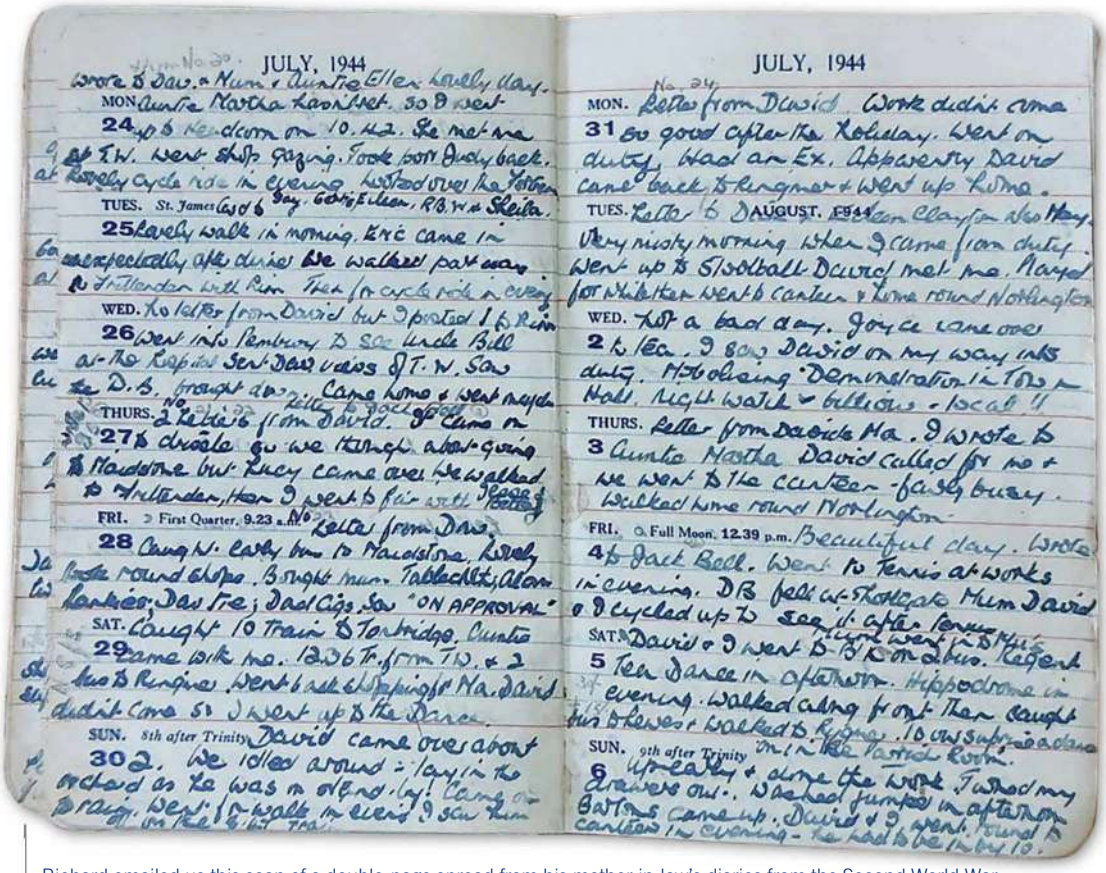


Society for the Protection of Child Life.

Magistrate
Cape Town

The report that Chris found at the Western Cape Archives in Cape Town, plus *(right)* his grandparents Jacob and Violet van der Sandt

Editor Replies **Such a sad childhood, but how wonderful that she built a better life.**


JULY, 1944

MON. 24 Auntie Martha Lavinhet. So I went up to Hendcom on 10.42. She met me at T.W. Went shops gazing. Took post Judy back. Lovely cycle ride in evening. Listened over the Forces.

TUES. St. James (Gd) Day. Gdfr Eileen, R.B.W. & Sheila. 25 Lovely walk in morning. Eric came in unexpectedly after dinner. We walked past war h. Hollenden with Rin. Then for cycle ride in evening.

WED. No letter from David but I posted 1 to Rin. 26 Went into Pembury to see Uncle Bill at the Rapids. Sent Dave vases of T.W. Saw the D.B. brought down. Came home & went cycle.

THURS. 2 letters from David. 27 Came in to divide up we thought about going to Maidstone but Lucy came over. We walked to Hollenden, then I went to fair with Peggy.

FRI. ☽ First Quarter, 9.23 a.m. 28 Caught 10 train to Maidstone. Lovely bus round shops. Bought mum Tablecloth, Alan Lankies, Dave tie, Dad Cigs. Saw "ON APPROVAL".

SAT. Caught 10 train to Tonbridge. Auntie 29 came with me. 12.06 Tr. from TB. & 2 bus to Ringmer. Went back with Peggy & Ma. David didn't come so I went up to the Dance.

SUN. 8th after Trinity. David came over about 30 2. We idled around & lay in the orchard as he was in off-duty. Came on Peggy. Went for walk in evening. I saw him off on the 8.47 train.

JULY, 1944

MON. 31 Letter from David. Work didn't come so good after the holiday. Went on duty. Had an Ex. Apparently David came back to Ringmer & went up home.

TUES. Letter to David. AUGUST, 1944. 1 Very misty morning when I came from duty. Went up to Stoolball Board met me. Played for Nikitin went to canteen & home round Nottington.

WED. Not a bad day. Joyce came over. 2 to tea. I saw David on my way into duty. Mobilising Demonstration in Town Hall. Night watch & billeting - local.

THURS. Letter from David & Ma. I wrote to 3 Auntie Martha. David called for me & we went to the canteen - fairly busy. Walked home round Nottington.

FRI. ○ Full Moon, 12.39 p.m. Beautiful day. Wrote 4 to Jack Beck. Went to Tennis at works in evening. D/B fell at Shortgate. Mum David & I cycled up to see it after tennis. David & I went to B-B-K on bus. Regent 5 Teen Dance in afternoon. Hippodrome in evening. Walked along front. Then caught bus to Hewes & walked to Ringmer. 10 ws supper & dance in the Parish Room.

SUN. 9th after Trinity. Upheaval & alone the work. I washed my 6 drawers out. Washed pumps in afternoon. Barnes came up. David & I went round to canteen in evening - he had to be in by 10.

Richard emailed us this scan of a double-page spread from his mother-in-law's diaries from the Second World War

Brush With Death

Jan Gore's feature in your August issue about the V1 bombing campaign was very informative, and arrived at an interesting time as my wife and I recently stayed with our sister-in-law. With failing eyesight she had asked us to help her read some of her mother's wartime diaries.

Iris Ellis, a part-time auxiliary firewoman, had lived on her parent's farm at Ringmer in Sussex. Although the village was quite rural it was close to the Channel coast, so had many alerts of Nazi bombers within the area.

On 4 August 1944, a Doodlebug hit the post office at Shortgate, a short distance from the village. Five people were killed, including Harold Lewis French, a First World War veteran who was a member of the Home Guard and also worked in the village butchers. He had cycled that day to deliver meat to Shortgate and had gladly accepted a cup of tea, but it was this delay that meant he was one of the unfortunate five to lose his life.

Iris recorded the fact that she visited the scene with her mother and future husband: "Went to tennis at works in evening. D/B fell at Shortgate. Mum, David and I cycled up to see it after tennis."

The diaries also highlight how normal life carried on, even under such difficult circumstances, and finally their celebrations for VE Day and VJ Day in nearby Brighton.

Richard West, by email

Editor Replies **Thanks Richard. Diaries are a fantastic way of seeing historic events through the eyes of ordinary people.**

Lloyd Pfeilitzer de Vere-Hunt responded to our article about cool British surnames: tinyurl.com/wdytya-cool
Wolf, Woolf, Wolff exists variously in our family but the coolest one is von Lüdinghausen genannt Wolff.

A Family Of Heroes

Years ago, a cousin of mine sent me a handwritten tree with lots of names from my mother's side of the family. Most of them I had never heard of, and it occurred to me that I knew next to nothing about my father's side either.

My parents had died, and all I had to go on was a birth certificate for my great great grandfather Henry which my father had obtained from Somerset House in the 1950s. Luckily, I'd started my research at a time when large amounts of genealogical data were becoming available online. I signed up with one of the providers, and was soon hooked.

Henry's forefathers were all agricultural labourers, but through talent and hard work he had risen to become steward of Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight. There, he had married a lady called Evelina, the daughter of the local barrack master, Captain Nicholas Travers, my 3x great grandfather.

Nicholas had fought in the Napoleonic Wars, as an officer in the legendary 95th Regiment, otherwise known as the Rifles and popularised by author Bernard Cornwell in his hugely successful novels about Richard Sharpe.

Nicholas was also one of the very few officers who had served in both the Royal Navy and the Army. And he had been all over the place – the Caribbean, South America, Spain and Portugal, Holland and North America.

I had accumulated quite a lot of material on him by this time. I then discovered that a portrait hangs in The Rifleman's Museum in Winchester. I was so chuffed to see it that I obtained the curator's permission to have a copy painted. It was then that I resolved to write a book, which took nearly two years. Nicholas also had five brothers, all of whom had fought in the armed services, so I included them as well.

The book runs to 200 pages, and is free from **sites.google.com/view/thefightingtravers**.

Paul Strickland, Dover

Paul's forebear Nicholas Travers

Editor Replies **I hope your story inspires other readers to write up the lives of their ancestors.**

Scottish Smuggling

We at Ballantrae History Group were interested to read the article on smuggling in the August issue, but were disappointed it focused on the south coast of England.

The Carrick Shore in South Ayrshire, which extends from Ayr in the north, to Ballantrae in the south, was a hotbed of smuggling activity in the 18th and early 19th centuries. With the Isle of Man around the corner and the Irish coast just on the horizon, it must have been almost easier to travel by boat than by road.

Ballantrae's own smuggling story is fascinating but complicated, veiled in mystery. In the 18th century, Ballantrae was well known as a place where contraband was brought to shore in small boats.

Frances Wilkins, a well-respected social historian and author with a special interest in smuggling, has separated fact from fiction in a fascinating book *Ballantrae's Smuggling Story*. (Wyre Forest Press, 2013). Since then, she has continued to gather additional material from the National Records of Scotland ▶

(including Customs House record books) and the Manx National Heritage Library, and has published *The Carrick Smugglers* (Wyre Forest Press, 2020) covering a wider area of Ayrshire.

Frances herself says, "Because of the wide range of detailed information that has survived it is possible to recreate a more in-depth sense of south-west Scotland's smuggling history than that of say, Kent or Sussex."
Judie McCourt, by email

Editor Replies Thank you Judie for sharing this information about Scottish smuggling.

Artificial Stupidity

Further to Debbie Kennett's article about AI tools in the July issue, I would strongly counsel people to be wary of placing too much confidence in the technology when seeking a translation of text in Old English.

Recently I asked ChatGPT to translate the 1554 will of my maternal 11x great grandfather, John Harman. It immediately produced a translation that looked plausible but, when I studied it in detail, had several problems.

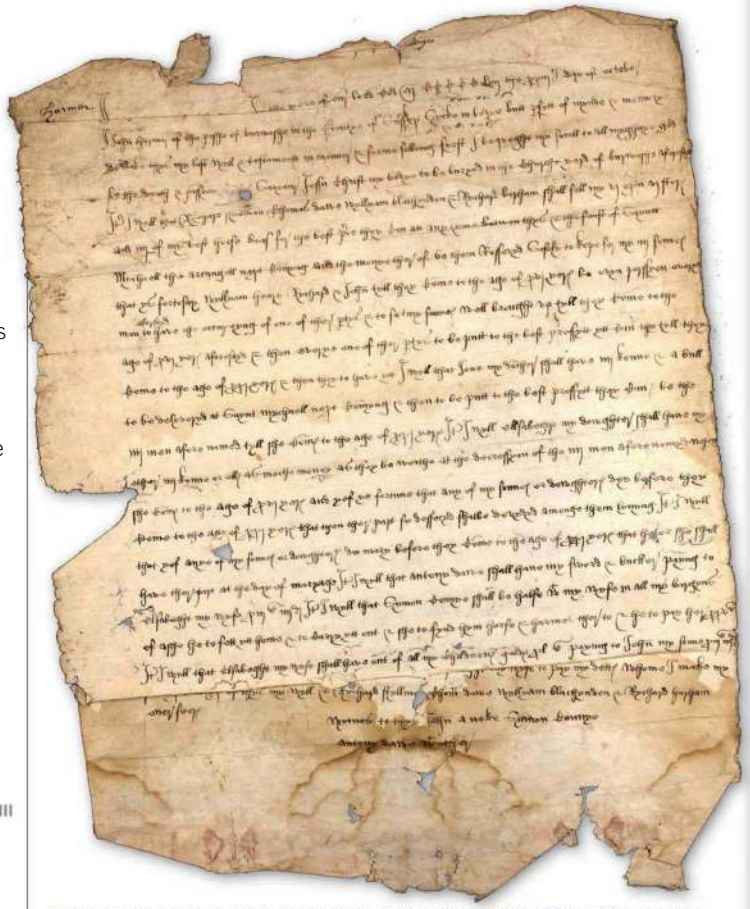
For example, it quoted a county with which he had no connection and also repeatedly mentioned a son that I knew he did not have.

I decided to cross-check ChatGPT's attempt using Copilot, the AI software in Windows 11. This immediately produced another translation that also looked plausible, but which differed entirely from ChatGPT's.

In the end, I paid a human expert at East Sussex Archives to translate the will. This third version contained significant personal and geographical details that tallied with my existing findings, and so appeared to be correct.

I am sure that AI has its uses in genealogical research, but care should be taken to assess the results for accuracy.
Alan Futter, Storrington

Editor Replies The handwriting in wills does seem to be something AI tools can't cope with yet, but, as Debbie said, developers are working on it. My main worry is AI tools' willingness to invent a fact rather than say, "I don't know."



AI tools have struggled to translate this will from the middle of the 16th century

@samcaligal.bsky.social responded to a round-up of 17th-century sources: tinyurl.com/wdytya-17th
The vital records (birth, marriage and death) of the Catholic Church in Quebec and Montreal go back to the 17th century. Wonderful resource for #FrenchCanadian descent!

Compounding Errors

Please, I implore people to triple-check their research before adding people to online trees.

A fellow member of Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) had claimed my 4x great grandmother as their own relative – along with all her descendants, too. Over the past four years I tried contacting them numerous times to ask them to recheck their research, because despite our ancestors having the same name, and being born about the same time, they were different people from different counties.

After four years they finally acknowledged their error, but the damage had been done because AncestryDNA's ThruLines tool now suggests we have a common ancestor, where there is none.

What's more, about 126 people have Ancestry trees that include my ancestor – and of those users, more than 50 of them have now added and accepted that the information presented by this person is correct.

We must all check multiple sources, and remember: "Close enough isn't good enough."
Kate Brial, by email

Editor Replies We regularly get complaints about incorrect trees and careless copying, but you make a very good point about how ThruLines can be affected.

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What's On

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PICK OF THE MONTH

We're heading to Thornbury… hope to see you there!

Bristol & Avon Family History Society Family And Local History Fair

13 September
a Turnberries Community Centre, Thornbury
e *fhfair@bafhs.onmicrosoft.com*
w **https://bafhs.org.uk/bath-avon-fhs-family-history-fair/**

Visitors to one of the society's previous fairs

Family historians won't want to miss this event in South Gloucestershire. The fair will feature stalls from groups devoted to family and local history, archive offices and national organisations, with the chance to receive help with your queries. There will also be old maps, CDs, new and second-hand books, and postcards on sale. In the afternoon, family historian and author Simon Fowler will give a talk on researching Second World War ancestors to mark 80 years since the end of the conflict. *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* will have a stall at the fair as well, so come along and say hi! Free.

IN PERSON

Heritage Open Days

12–21 September
a Across England
w **heritageopendays.org.uk/**
This annual English event is back, and the theme this year is 'Architecture'. As usual, historic sites will open their doors, offering access to places you don't usually get the opportunity to see. Free.

We Have Ways Fest

12–14 September
a Blackpit Brewery, Buckingham
e *wehavewaysfest@goalhanger.com*
w **wehavewaysfest.co.uk/**
The festival, a spin-off from the hugely popular podcast about the Second World War by historian James Holland and comedian Al Murray, brings together authors, veterans and other experts in military history, plus displays of hardware and vehicles, traders, music and food. Various prices.

Alde Valley Suffolk Family History Group Family & Local History Open Day

27 September
a The Long Shop Museum, Leiston
e *events@avsfhg.org.uk*
w **avsfhg.org.uk**
Here you can visit a wide range of stalls and get advice on researching your tree, dating family photographs and DNA testing. Free, donations welcome.

Somerset & Dorset Family History Society 50th Anniversary AGM And Open Day

27 September
a The Exchange, Sturminster Newton
e *blackmorevalegroup@gmail.com*
w **https://sdfhs.org**
This event, which is hosted by the society's Blackmore Vale Group and part of the town's History Week, includes talks from Jim Williams and Kirsty Gray. Free.

The Family History Show

4 October
a Kempton Park Racecourse, Sunbury-on-Thames
w **thefamilyhistoryshow.com/london/**
As well as an exhibition hall and free consultations, Mark Bayley, Donna Rutherford, Nick Barratt and Amelia Bennett will speak at the show. £8 in advance (two for £14), or £12 on the day.

The History Of Oxleas Woods

4 October
a Dartford Science and Technology College
t 01322 527604
w **tinyurl.com/nwkfhs-oxleas**
Tom Wareham will discuss the history of this ancient woodland and its inhabitants. Free to North West Kent Family History Society members, non-members asked to make a small donation.

ONLINE

Victorian Crime and Punishment – Courts, Police And Prisons

Starts 10 September
w **tinyurl.com/pharos-vic-crim**
Discover how to use Victorian criminal records with this five-week course from Richard Holt. £70 unassessed or £92 assessed.

Tracing Your Railway Ancestors

12 September
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-rail-anc**
Jessamy Carlson shares her tips for using records of railway companies before nationalisation in 1947 in this webinar from The National Archives. Free.

Tracing Currier Ancestors

18 September
w **tinyurl.com/sog-curriers**
Kathy Kirkpatrick explains the available sources if your forebear worked with leather and other hides in this talk from the Society of Genealogists. £10.

Reading From The Archives: No Place Like Home

23 September
w **tinyurl.com/brite-nro-home**
This talk from Norfolk Record Office explores what the archives show about the meaning of 'home', including the experiences of US servicemen in Norfolk in the Second World War. Free.

Online House Detective Course

Starts 25 September
w **tinyurl.com/source-hs-det**
This six-week course on house history from Suffolk Archives is run by local historian and author Stephen Jeffery-Poulter. £60.

The New Poor Law Workshop

27 September
w **tinyurl.com/berksfhs-npl-work**
Joan Dils reveals how the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act affected our ancestors in this Berkshire Family History Society event. £10 (members £9).

BOOK AHEAD

Learn about DNA testing with the Guild of One-Name Studies

DNA Seminar

18 October
a Beauchamp College, Leicester
t 0800 011 2182
w **one-name.org/seminar-events/**
Topics during this day of talks include the impact of AI on DNA research, creating a surname project, and ancestral origins and making the most of matches – both from *WDYTYA? Magazine* contributor Debbie Kennett. £27.50, booking closes 5 October.

News

Rosemary Collins reports on the latest data releases and genealogy news

Ancestry adds parish records from Suffolk

Almost nine million parish records from Suffolk have been added to the family history website Ancestry (ancestry.co.uk).

The site has released four sets of records from the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich: 4,576,549 baptism, marriage and burial records (1538–1812); 2,213,998 baptism records (1813–1924); 1,532,634 marriage records (1754–1949); and 514,948 burial records (1813–1999).

The records were digitised from collections held at The Hold archive facility in Ipswich (**www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/about-suffolk-archives/the-hold/**).

Ancestry is a subscription-based website, but the records will be free to view on computers at The Hold.

Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for environment, communities and equality, commented, "This project is a fantastic step forward in making Suffolk's rich history more accessible."

He continued, "Whether you're overseas, have mobility challenges or simply prefer to research from home, these records are now just a click away. By digitising these documents, we're not only preserving them for future generations but also helping people reconnect with their heritage. I hope this sparks even more interest in the stories held by Suffolk Archives."

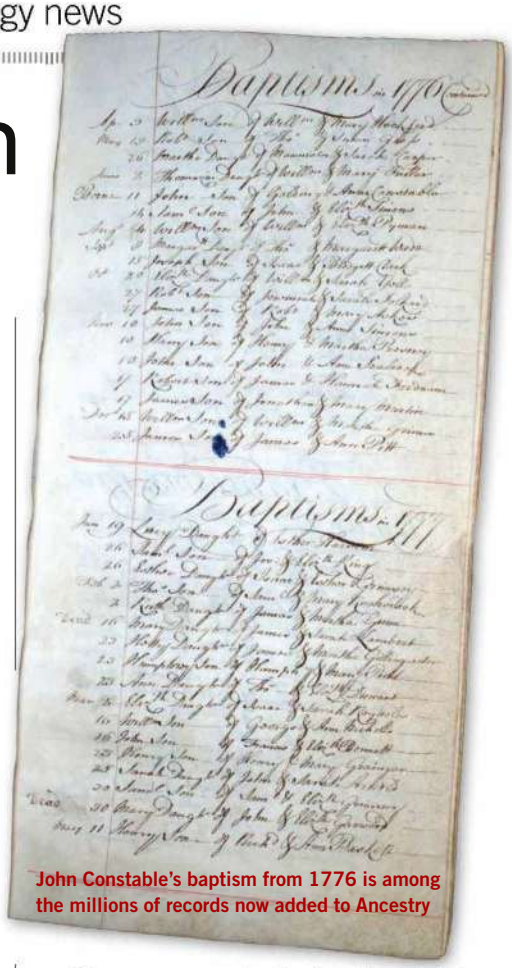
Before the arrival of civil registration in 1837, parish records are the main means for finding your ancestors' births, marriages and deaths, with baptism and burial records revealing the beginning and end of their lives.

As well as showing the lives of millions of ordinary Suffolk residents, the records include details of a number of well-known people.

For example, the 1776 baptisms for East Bergholt record that "John son of Golding & Anne Constable" was born on 11 June.

John Constable became one of England's most famous painters, and depicted the county's landscape in artworks such as *The Hay Wain* (1821).

There is also an earlier baptism record for "Samuel Appliton" at Little Waldingfield in 1624. Samuel Appleton emigrated to the British colony in Massachusetts with his parents as a child, and became a military commander in the 1675–1678 conflict against indigenous peoples known as King Philip's War.



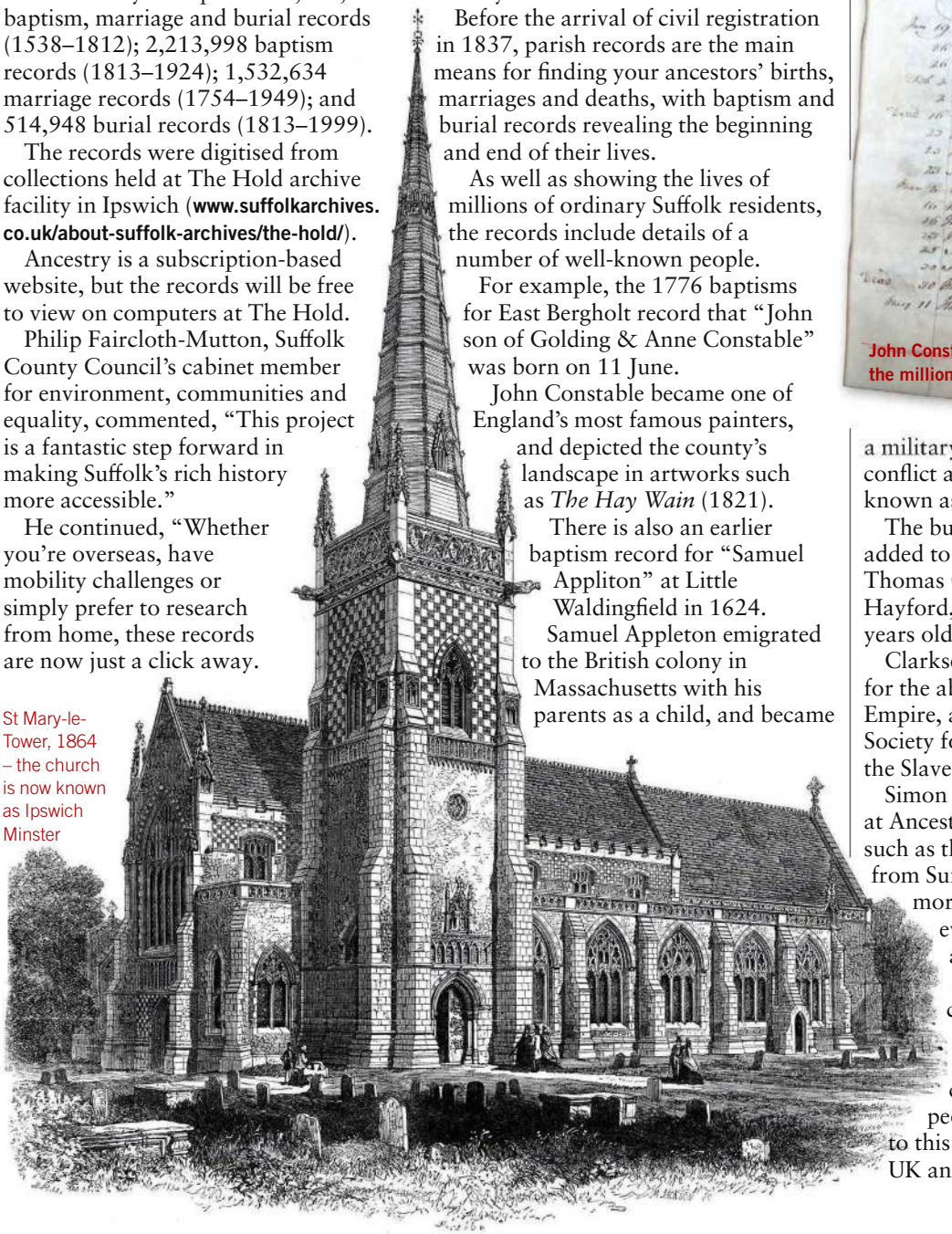
John Constable's baptism from 1776 is among the millions of records now added to Ancestry

The burial records that have been added to the website include that of Thomas Clarkson on 2 October 1846 at Hayford, which reveals that he was 87 years old when he died.

Clarkson was a leading campaigner for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, and one of the founders of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

Simon Pearce, family history expert at Ancestry, explained, "Collections such as this important set of records from Suffolk will help us discover more information about the key events in our ancestors' lives, and help to fill in the gaps in many family trees with connections to Suffolk.

"The collection is of huge importance to both the community in Suffolk and people with connections back to this county scattered all over the UK and the globe."



St Mary-le-Tower, 1864 – the church is now known as Ipswich Minster

GETTY IMAGES

NEWS IN BRIEF

One of the tribunal records on Findmypast

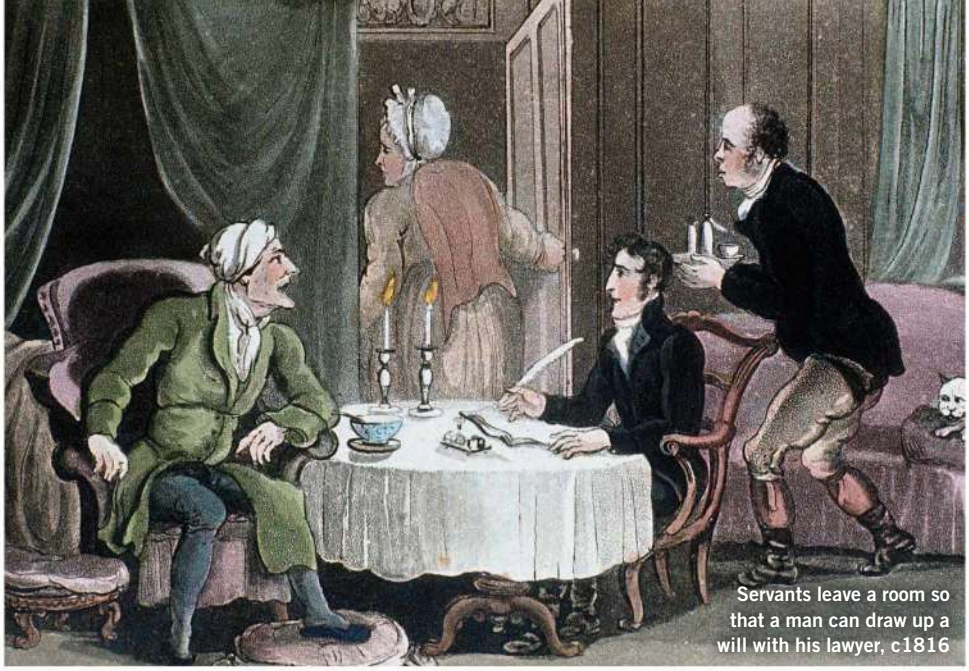
Records of conscription tribunals released online

Family history website Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has added a collection of 1,376 records of First World War conscription tribunals from Southwark in Surrey, digitising material held by Southwark Archives (**tinyurl.com/southwark-archives**). After conscription began in 1916, tribunals were set up across the country to hear appeals from men who claimed exemption on grounds such as ill health, family hardship, essential civilian work, or conscientious objection.

This 1784 map of Cornwall is now online

NLS site gets early maps

The National Library of Scotland has added 356 maps of England and Wales, dating between 1610 and 1890, to its free historic maps website **maps.nls.uk**. They include 167 county maps covering 40 counties; 106 town plans including 64 of London; 62 maps of the whole of England and Wales; and 21 nautical charts. They provide a useful depiction of the places where our ancestors lived.



Servants leave a room so that a man can draw up a will with his lawyer, c1816

TheGenealogist releases more than 330,000 will and probate records

Family history website TheGenealogist (thegenealogist.co.uk) has added over 330,000 early will and probate records.

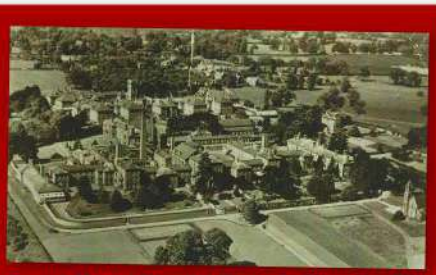
The additions consist of volumes of transcribed historic records, including *Archdeaconry of Cornwall Wills and Administrations* (1569–1699); *A Calendar of Wills, Gloucestershire* (1541–1650); *Calendars of Lincoln Wills* (1320–1600); *Wills and Administrations Preserved in the District Probate Court of Lewes* (1541–1652); *Dougal's Index Register to Next of Kin, Heirs at Law, and Cases of Unclaimed Money*; *Commissariot Record of Edinburgh, Register of Testaments* (1514–1600); *Commissariot of Inverness, Hamilton & Campsie Testaments* (1630–1800); and *Abstracts of Probates and Sentences in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury* (1620–1624), as well as *Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills Index* (1653–1656).

Commissariot Record of Edinburgh includes a record of the will of "Mr George [Buchannan], preceptor to the King's Majesty" from 20 February 1582–1583. George Buchanan was a prominent historian and humanist scholar. He both served royalty at different times, including as an adviser to Mary Queen of Scots and a tutor to the young James VI, and wrote *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579), a political tract considered scandalous for arguing that political power originates from the people, not the sovereign.

"Buchannan, Mr George" is mentioned in the records

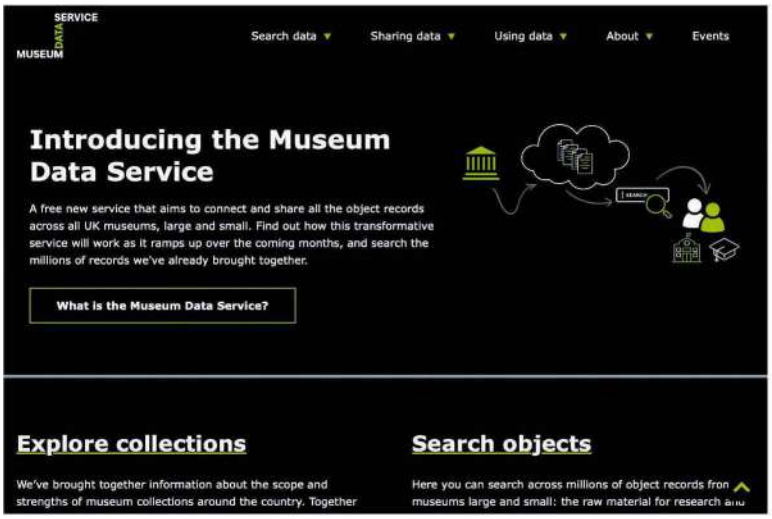
CAN YOU HELP?

George Marshall Medical Museum in Worcester (**medicalmuseum.org.uk/georgemarshallmuseum**) is seeking volunteers to research the family history of patients at Worcester City and County Pauper Lunatic Asylum (1852–1910). A digital archive of patient records is available at **theinfirmary.educationhost.co.uk/Search.php**, and the stories of patients and hospital staff who have been researched so far are available at **medicalmuseum.org.uk/outside-the-asylum-patients**. There are more than 9,000 asylum records containing details of up to 5,000 patients. The aim of the research, part of the museum's 'Outside the Asylum' project, is to help us view the patients as people not just patients, and to find out why they were admitted. If you would like to take part, please email Louise Price on *gmmedicalmuseum@gmail.com*.



Powick Mental Hospital (formerly Worcester City and County Pauper Lunatic Asylum), 1920

GETTY IMAGES | CHARLES HASTINGS EDUCATION CENTRE



The money will enable the online database to expand dramatically

Museum Data Service receives new funding

The Museum Data Service (MDS), an online database of the UK's museum collections, has received funding for the next three years.

The MDS launched last year at **museumdata.uk**, and is a joint venture between the University of Leicester, Art UK and Collections Trust.

The website now has data for more than six million objects from over 150 museums, including the British Museum, National Museums Scotland and the National Army Museum. It eventually aims to cover the whole of the UK.

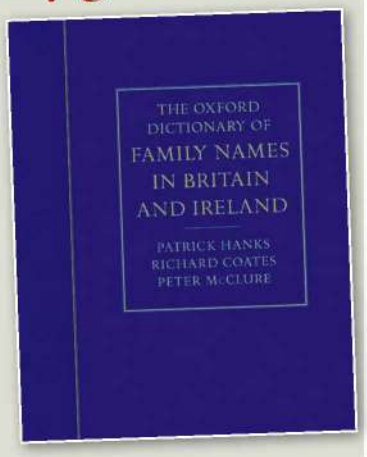
The new funding amounts to £800,765, including £689,989 from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

It is part of a wider investment of £59 million into digital research infrastructure by the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology and UK Research and Innovation.

Dr Catherine Eagleton, chair of the MDS, said, "This support means we can continue to develop and grow, working closely with the other parts of the AHRC's digital research infrastructure to revolutionise access to and research with collections."

Surname dictionary goes free

The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland is currently available to download as a free e-book. The dictionary was published by Oxford University Press in 2016 and edited by Patrick Hanks, Richard Coates and Peter McClure, and has entries for more than 45,000 English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Cornish and immigrant surnames, with information including the name's origins and lists of early bearers. The hardback costs £440, or £115 for a concise edition. However, at the time of writing the Kindle edition is free to UK customers of Amazon (**tinyurl.com/am-oxf-dic**). You will need a Kindle or the Kindle app to read the dictionary.



Don't miss this chance to purchase the surname dictionary while you can

4
The number of volumes of the 17th-century diaries of Alice Thornton, described as a female and northern Samuel Pepys, that have been published online (**tinyurl.com/guard-thorn**)

Over 60
The number of objects relating to couple Alf and Caroline Edwards, who met while working as servants at Brodsworth Hall in Yorkshire in the Edwardian era, that have been donated to the hall by their grandson (**tinyurl.com/guard-brod**)

109
The number of years since the cruiser HMS *Nottingham* sank after being attacked by a U-boat in the North Sea – its wreck has now been discovered (**tinyurl.com/sky-hms-nott**)

14,179
The number of records in the collection 'Ireland, Infants Born in Irish Workhouses Index, 1872–1874' that has been added to **ancestry.co.uk**

Birthlink has shredded crucial documents

Scottish adoption charity fined for shredding 'irreplaceable' records

An adoption charity based in Edinburgh has been fined £18,000 by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for shredding personal records.

Birthlink (**birthlink.org.uk**) has operated the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland, which helps adoptees reconnect with their birth families and vice versa, since 1984.

However, in 2021 the charity destroyed some 'Linked Records' due to lack of space.

'Linked Records' are files of cases where people had already been linked with the person they sought. They are thought to have included handwritten letters from birth parents, photographs, and copies of birth certificates.

Approximately 4,800 records were destroyed, of which up to 10 per cent may be irreplaceable.

Sally Anne Poole, the ICO's head of investigations, said, "The destroyed records had the potential to be an unknown memory, an identity, a sense of belonging, answers – all deeply personal pieces in the jigsaw of a person's history – some now lost for eternity."

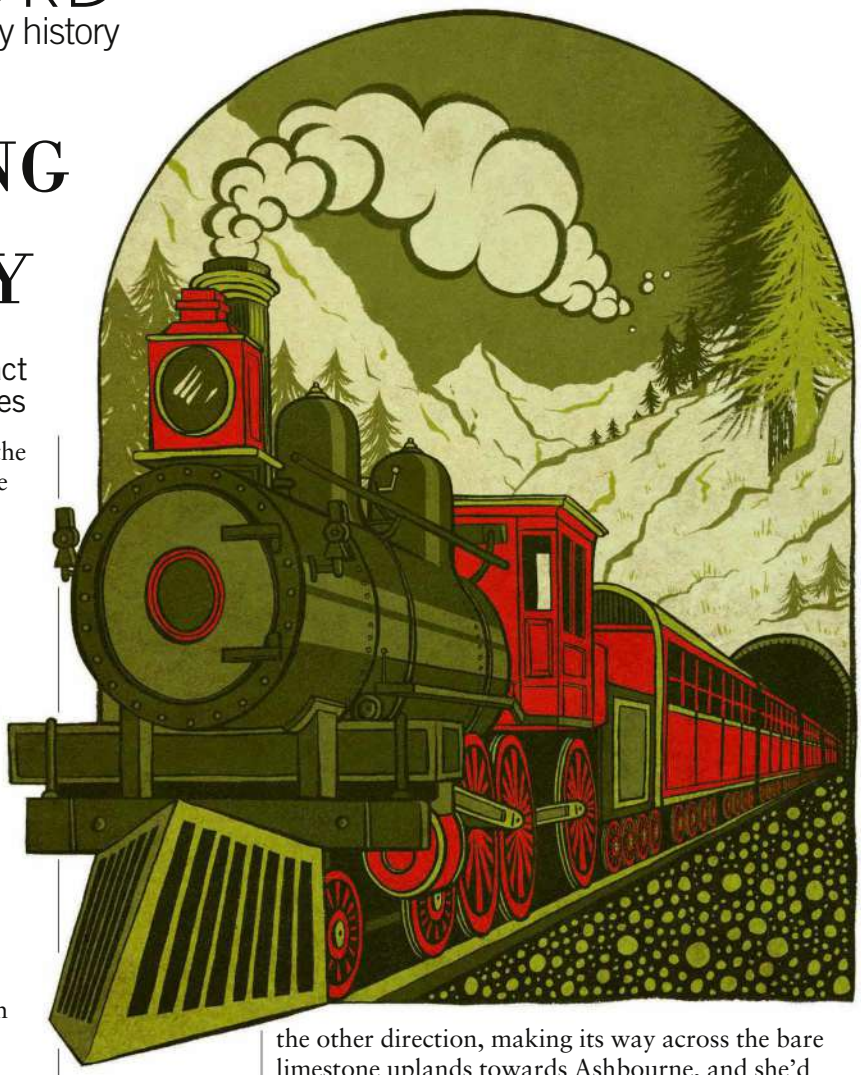
Abbi Jackson, Birthlink's interim chief executive officer, said that it offered its "deepest and most sincere apology".

Anyone who thinks that they may have been affected should contact the charity via 0131 225 6441 or *dataprotection@birthlink.org.uk*.

GETTY IMAGES

Remembering The Railway

Alan Crosby explains the dramatic impact that trains have had on his relations' lives



This year sees the celebrations marking the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the world's first steam-worked passenger line. It is an occasion to reflect on the differences that the railway subsequently made to the lives of our mid-Victorian forebears. For some families, of course, railways were everything. Generations of men and boys (and a not inconsiderable number of women) worked for the railway company, proud of its locomotive livery and its impressive uniforms, posing in those formal photographs of the employees of a country station that you often see in books and museums.

In my mother's family, Uncle Arthur was an engine driver – one of the most glamorous jobs that a young boy could imagine. He worked for the London, Midland and Scottish Railway and was based at Macclesfield, and was regarded with awe by the rest of the family. Other men in the extended family worked at Beyer, Peacock and Company on the east side of Manchester, in a vast works making railway engines that were exported to all corners of the globe.

My dad's family were a little above that sort of thing. My great grandfather, William John Dean, was a self-made small businessman in late Victorian Manchester, and in 1903 he took his wife and children to live at Buxton in Derbyshire. They bought a house on the north-east side of the town very close to Fairfield Halt, and every morning he caught the early train down to Manchester, and back again in the evening on the London & North Western Railway. But in 1917, as a wartime economy measure, the railway halt was closed, never to reopen. 'The Old Man', as he was universally known, was having none of that. He continued, every morning, to walk down the steep path to the disused platform at Fairfield, and the early train would stop, quite illegally, to pick him up. Now that was real customer service!

She landed at Quebec and took the train across the Prairies

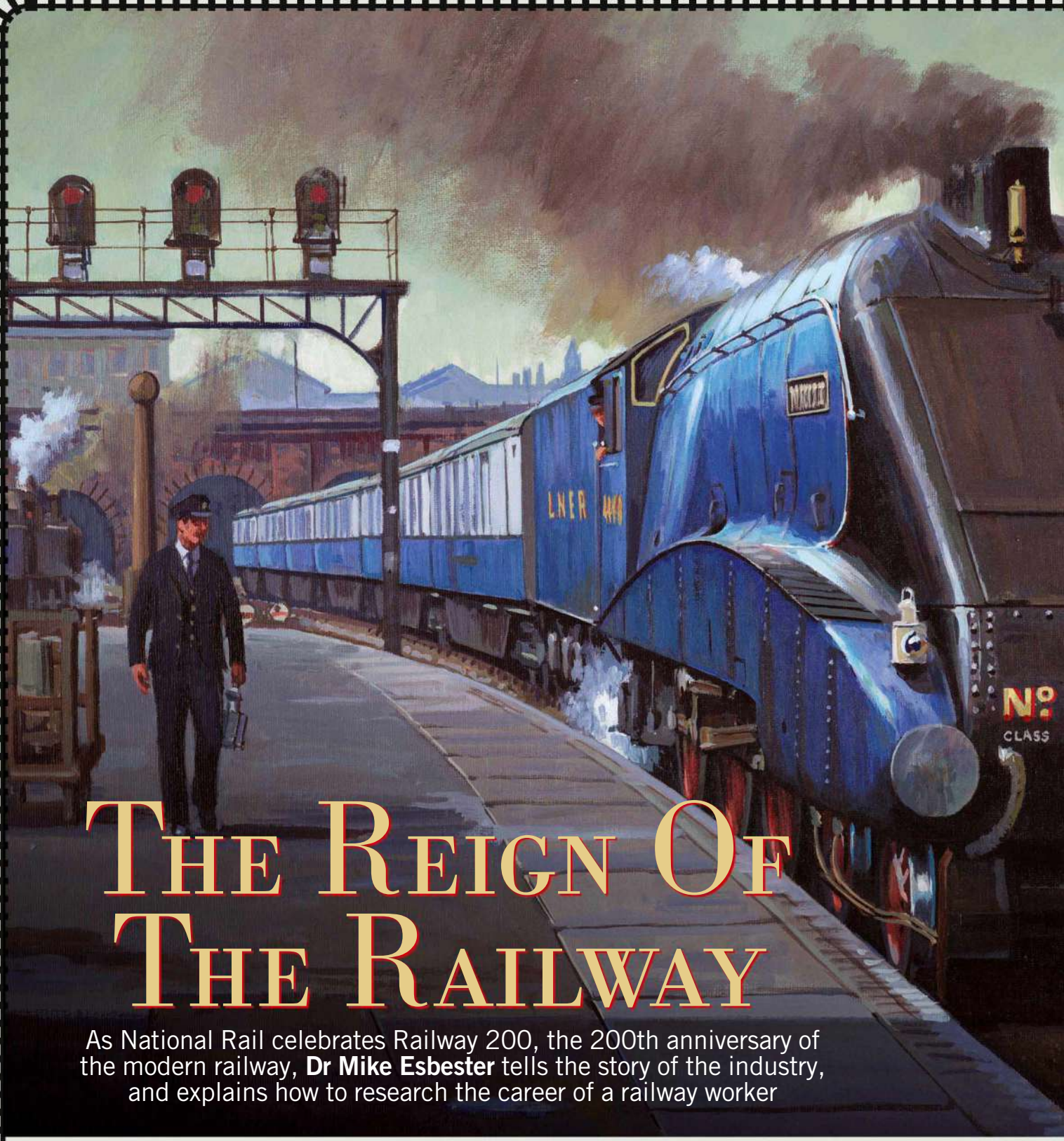
His second daughter, my grandmother, for a time was an unqualified teacher at the tiny school in the little village of Biggin, on the edge of Dovedale in the Peak District. She would get the early train in the other direction, making its way across the bare limestone uplands towards Ashbourne, and she'd alight at the lonely windswept station at Parsley Hay, to be collected by a local farmer with his horse and cart, and taken on down to Biggin.

Fifteen years earlier, she had undertaken a very different train journey. Emigrating to marry the man she thought loved her, she landed at Quebec in Canada and, entirely alone, took the train across the endless Prairies to Calgary. There on the platform waiting was her fiancé. Their marriage was a disaster, and six years later, now with two small children in tow and with all her dreams in ruins, she went back across the Prairies to Quebec, en route to the Old Country and a life of bitterness and regret.

Her husband, my grandfather, had an exciting railway connection of his own. He had emigrated to Canada with his mother in 1909, and settled in Calgary. From 1911 to 1915, when he joined the Canadian Army, he was a locomotive fireman on the Canadian Pacific Railway, working the heavy trains on the steeply graded main line from Calgary and Banff through the Rockies to British Columbia, via the notorious Kicking Horse Pass: the steepest main line in North America, and the scene of numerous derailments and disasters. In 1909 the summit stretch had been replaced by two spectacular Spiral Tunnels, which remain one of the most impressive railway engineering achievements in the world. I visited in 2015, and it was thrilling to see where my grandfather, scarcely more than a boy, had worked a century before. I love railways and train travel – and they are part of my family history.

ALAN CROSBY lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION WWW.SUEGENT.COM



The Reign Of The Railway

As National Rail celebrates Railway 200, the 200th anniversary of the modern railway, **Dr Mike Esbester** tells the story of the industry, and explains how to research the career of a railway worker

Today we might minimise or even overlook the railway's significance, because it is such an established part of our lives. Yet at its height the industry employed more than half a million people across Britain and Ireland, and played a huge role in shaping national and international affairs.

Railways existed long before steam traction. Horse-drawn routes like the 1722 Tranent–Cockenzie Waggonway in East Lothian, Scotland, moved goods (often coal) along wooden and later metal rails. Freight was a key driver, and early railways were concentrated in areas that produced or used minerals. Some passenger services like the Swansea and Mumbles Railway in South-West Wales, from 1804, were horse-drawn.

Static steam engines, such as beam engines for pumping water, provided knowledge and experience that engineers like Cornishman Richard Trevithick (1771–1833) made mobile. In 1804 Trevithick successfully demonstrated a steam engine on the Merthyr Tydfil tramroad from Penydarren to Abercynon in South-East Wales. All of this was vital for what was to come.

On 27 September 1825, what's understood as the first modern

GETTY IMAGES

The London and North Eastern Railway steam locomotive *Mallard* arrives at London King's Cross in the late 1930s

passenger steam-train journey took place on the Stockton and Darlington Railway in north-east England. The idea took off, and the first actively planned 'intercity' steam-powered railway, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, opened five years later.

'Navvies' – navigators, often of Irish origin and with experience working on canals – were employed to dig railway tunnels, cuttings and embankments. It was hard, physical labour employing thousands of men and their families as railway building gathered pace from 1830. An intense bout of financial speculation, known as 'Railway Mania', in the mid-1840s saw many thousands of miles of railway planned – much, but not all, of which was built.

In Britain, railways were financed and constructed privately, with expansion driven by commercial demands, unlike in mainland Europe where many railways were state-constructed and state-run. And expand in the UK it certainly did – from a route network covering fewer than 100 miles in 1830, to about 6,600 miles of track by 1850.

Railway travel was soon normalised, largely thanks to a process of familiarisation. Our ancestors were exposed to railways in all sorts of ways – sometimes by using them themselves, but it might be through seeing them or hearing about them from others. Railway guidebooks gave people practical advice on how to get tickets, and what to see on their journey. Timetables and 'railway time' – a standardised, nationwide time that gradually replaced local times – all spread the idea of steam-powered travel.

For The Benefit Of All

Cultural products – games, music, stories, engravings and more – promoted the idea of the railways. And thanks to the easier distribution of goods and news, as well as the widening of sports fixtures because players could go further afield, people of all classes saw themselves benefiting from the network. By the mid-1850s, more than 100 million passenger journeys were being made annually in the UK. Railways also made a significant mark globally, including as a tool of empire for Britain and other colonial powers.

Once the navvies had performed their vital work, a vast array of people kept the railways moving. Without the dedication of railway staff, none of this success would have been possible. For much of the past 200 years, working on and for the railways has been seen as a respectable job – and certainly before 1939, it might have been a job for life.

The roles were incredibly varied. We might immediately think of drivers, or firemen shovelling coal into a firebox, or the station masters or porters – but the nature of railway work was far more complex. The bigger companies, like the London and North Western Railway or the ▶

Great Western Railway (GWR), made and operated virtually everything in-house. This meant that they had workshop staff – machinists, foundrymen, skilled metal workers, and carpenters – alongside the operational workers, such as the locomotive crews, guards, permanent-way (track-maintenance) staff, labourers, shunters (someone coupling and uncoupling wagons) and signalmen.

Railway companies had extensive interests beyond stream trains, too. They operated ships, docks, hotels, road vehicles (horse, electric and later internal-combustion engine) and more. As a result there was a place for virtually anyone in the industry, including women. By c1914, roughly 13,000 women were employed by the railways, albeit usually only in roles that were deemed to be 'appropriate' for their sex.

A veteran track worker

Rigid Discipline

Railway employers were paternalistic, and claimed that they could look after their staff. They certainly provided a range of benefits beyond pay alone, including tied accommodation, social benefits such as clubs, and in some cases access to medical care. The understanding, however, was that staff would accept the sometimes rigid discipline that was imposed by quasi-militaristic foremen and managers. Since the companies were often spread out geographically, they needed to use bureaucratic methods of keeping tabs on staff. As a result, some very valuable records have survived for today's researchers.

The companies' power was challenged by trade unions: the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), set up in 1871 and 1880 respectively. Until the 1910s, companies refused to recognise or work with the unions – but the unions supported railwaymen MPs who advocated on behalf of colleagues in public environments.

That advocacy was needed on many grounds, not least of which was safety. Manual railway roles – especially those that required staff to work at track level, among moving trains – were very dangerous. In 1900, for example, five staff were injured or killed for every passenger who was hurt in a railway accident. The tragically high number of worker accidents has produced a significant body of records, however, which are very useful to family and local historians and other researchers. These are being transcribed by the Railway Work, Life & Death project, an initiative between the University of Portsmouth (**port.ac.uk**), the National Railway Museum (**railwaymuseum.org.uk**) and the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick (**warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/**), and made freely available to all on the project's website: **railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk**.

Given the relative stability and respectability of much railway work, extended families worked for the railways across generations. Female relations played significant roles in the

British Rail in numbers

5.4 m
The number of passenger journeys in 1838. By 1897 the figure was one billion

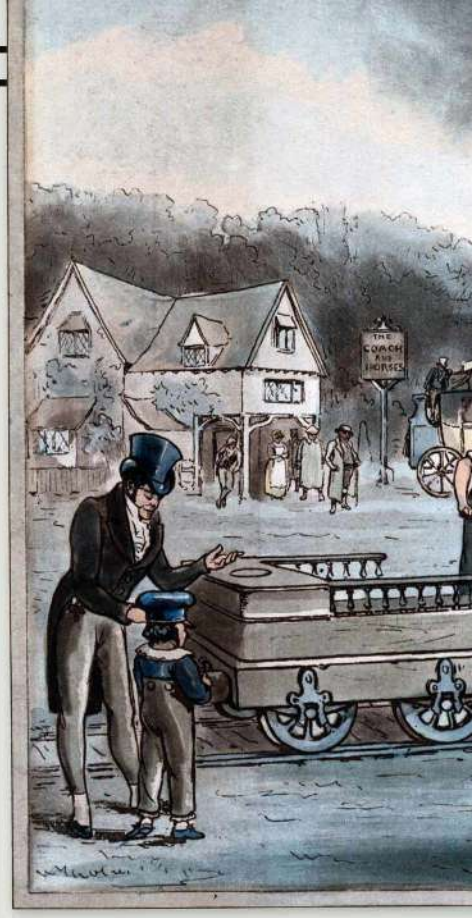
640k
The total number of staff employed in 1913

23,676
The number of miles in the rail network c1914

123
The number of rail companies in 1921

91,307
The number of women employed in 1945

67,700
The number of jobs that were lost following the 1963 Beeching Report



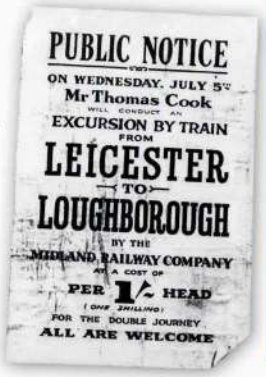
Railway Milestones

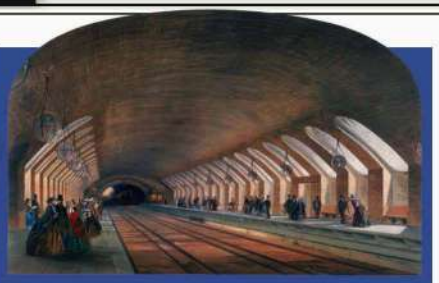
Some of the most important events in the history of Britain's railways

1825
Locomotion No. 1 takes passengers between Stockton and Darlington on the first public passenger journey hauled by a steam locomotive.

1830
The world's first 'intercity' railway opens, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, but at the opening William Huskisson MP is killed by a train.

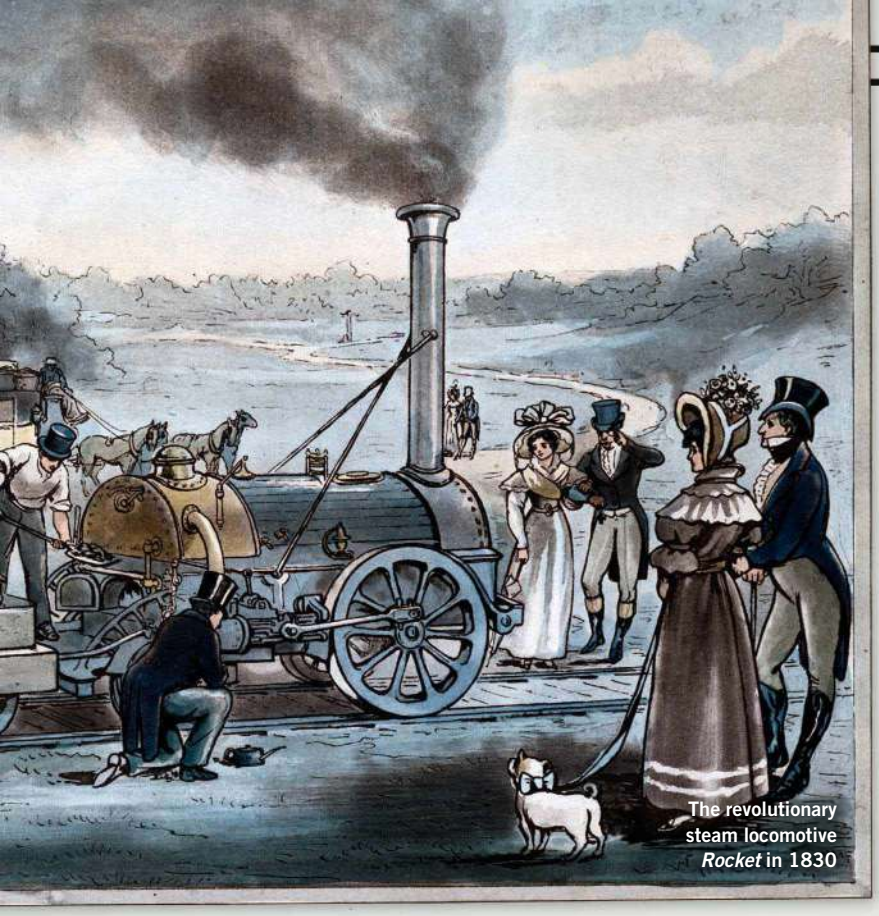
1841
Thomas Cook's first excursion train transports daytrippers from Leicester to Loughborough and back, establishing a tourism dynasty.





1863
London's Metropolitan Line, the world's first underground passenger railway, opens (Baker Street station is pictured). In 1896 the second and third underground railways open in Budapest and Glasgow.

GETTY IMAGES



The revolutionary steam locomotive *Rocket* in 1830

railway world, albeit not often formally recognised, caring for families and enabling male employees to get to work. From the late 1890s, employers and trade unions alike drew upon the metaphorical idea of the 'railway family', to cement loyalty in and outside the immediate workplace. This involved thinking about a wider community involvement.

The Railway At War

The state took over the railways during the First World War, as part of the war effort, only returning them to private control in 1921. Wartime conditions brought hardship to the railways and their staff, but also opened up new possibilities for tens of thousands of our female forebears who took up roles as men joined the armed forces.

The railway industry was restructured in 1923, when the existing 120-plus railway companies were combined into a handful of major firms – the 'Big Four': GWR; the Southern Railway, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway; and the London and North Eastern Railway. The challenge from road traffic mounted, and passenger journeys declined from more than two billion in 1919 to 1.2 billion in 1938. The firms tried to cut costs, not least in periods of economic downturn, including by closing ▶

TOP TIP!

The *British Railways Pre-Grouping Atlas and Gazetteer, 6th Edition* (Ian Allan, 2015) will tell you which companies operated at a particular station pre-1923, or visit **railmaponline.com/UKIEMap.php#**.

Walter Bridger 1852–1930

Like many men of his era, Walter worked for over 50 years for the same railway company

Walter Bridger was born in Chichester, Sussex, in 1852. He joined the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway (LBSCR) in 1868, opening and closing level-crossing gates. The company moved him around its network as it promoted him. By 1873 Walter was at Three Bridges, Crawley, as a shunter, where he had an accident that cost him his left leg. He resumed work for the LBSCR as a signalman, at Chichester, in 1875; he was supplied with an artificial leg.

He married Charlotte Standing in 1876, and they had six children. Walter remained as a signalman at Fishbourne Junction, west of Chichester, until his retirement in 1919.

He was active in the trade union the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, and was a Sunday School teacher and a local councillor. He died in 1930.

One of his sons, Walter James, became an LBSCR signalman. Tragically he was killed in an accident at Clapham Junction in 1909. One of Walter's daughters, Charlotte, also joined the LBSCR, as a ticket collector at Chichester during the First World War.

The research on Walter and his family was carried out by Geoff Robinson as part of the Portsmouth Area Railway Pasts project, a collaboration between the Railway Work, Life & Death project and the Havant Local History Group; a more detailed blog post can be seen at **tinyurl.com/rail-accidents-bridger**. Many thanks to Walter's descendants for their assistance.

Walter stands outside the signal box at Fishbourne Junction

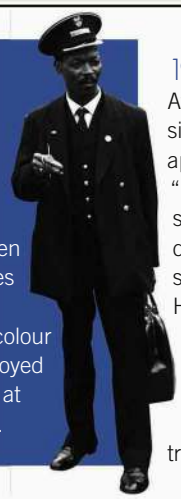
1871
The trade union the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants is formed, to give workers a much-needed voice.

1915
Three trains collide outside the Quintinshill signal box near Gretna Green in Dumfriesshire. It remains Britain's worst rail disaster, with 226 dead and 246 injured.

1923
Approximately 120 railway companies are grouped into the 'Big Four': the Great Western Railway; the London, Midland and Scottish Railway; the London and North Eastern Railway; and the Southern Railway.

1948
Britain's railway companies are nationalised, becoming British Railways, under the postwar Labour government.

1966
Asquith Xavier ends a colour bar at London Euston when he becomes the first person of colour to be employed as a guard at the station.



1979
After she signed her application "K Harrison" so as not to disclose her sex, Karen Harrison is appointed as Britain's first female mainline-train driver.

GETTY IMAGES | TONY ELKIN

unprofitable services. They also innovated, not least getting involved in the nascent airline industry in the 1930s.

The state again took control of the industry during the Second World War, and the railways played a key role in the war effort. Maintenance and investment were postponed, for understandable reasons – but this left the private firms with an even worse situation when they resumed running the railways after the war was over.

In the end, following a landslide election victory in 1945 the Labour government nationalised the railways, and on 1 January 1948 British Railways was born. However, nationalisation was no panacea; the decline in passenger travel continued, particularly when petrol rationing was lifted in 1950 and motor vehicles became even more widespread.

The state again took control of the industry during the Second World War

It didn't help that steam trains were increasingly seen as dirty, slow and old in an era looking to the stars. Two key moments tried to turn this around. First, in 1955 a Modernisation Plan promised to phase out steam and introduce diesel and electric traction by the end of 1968. Second, in 1963 the chair of the British Railways Board Richard Beeching published a report that proposed radically reshaping Britain's rail network,

9 Crucial Records

Mike recommends these sources for researching railway relations

Accident Records

As well as the Railway Work, Life & Death database (**railway accidents.port.ac.uk**), Ancestry's 'UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833–1956' (**bit.ly/anc-rail-emp**), based on material at The National Archives (TNA), has accident records.

Company Minutes

Railway-company committee minutes often mentioned individual staff – not least if they needed additional support or had done something noteworthy (good or bad). Try TNA.

Newspapers

Articles in the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**) may name a railway worker, especially one in an accident. 'Everything' subscribers to Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) can access the collection too.

TAYPORT RAILWAY ACCIDENT.

Yesterday the Dundee police, acting on the instructions of the County Fiscal, apprehended George Barnet, guard of the goods train which caused the collision at Tayport last Friday. Barnet was conveyed to Cupar, where he was examined before Sheriff Lamond, and subsequently committed to prison pending further inquiries.

RAILWAY ACCIDENT.

Joseph Carter, employed at the waggon works at Bromsgrove Railway Station, was knocked down and killed at an early hour yesterday by a passing goods train.

Punishment Books

'Black books' tell us about staff misdemeanours and disciplinary action. Surviving English and Welsh records are preserved at TNA. Some are included in the Ancestry collection mentioned above.

Staff Magazines

These can reveal promotions and staff moves, and are available at the likes of TNA, the National Railway Museum (NRM; **railwaymuseum.org.uk**) and the Great Western Railway museum STEAM (**steam-museum.org.uk**).

Great Western Railway Magazine.
And Temperance Union Record.

Staff Registers

TNA has English, Irish and Welsh registers; some are in Ancestry's 'UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833–1956'. The site also has employment records from Irish railway companies (1870–1940) at **bit.ly/anc-ire-rail**.

Union Registers

For the most part these are held at the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick (**warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/**). Some membership details are on Findmypast in 'Britain, Trade Union Membership Registers' at **bit.ly/fmp-trade-reg**.

Wages Books

Relatively few wages books survive, and can be found in TNA and local archives. Some are on Ancestry in 'UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833–1956'.

Worker Testimonies

Some early autobiographies revisit the period around the start of the First World War, but most date from the second half of the 20th century. Try the NRM.

GETTY IMAGES

This British Railways poster from c1949 shows trains powered by *(from left)* steam, diesel and electricity alone

GETTY IMAGES

something many still remember with disdain and even disgust. It identified nearly 2,400 stations and 5,000 miles of track to close. Protests saved a few lines. However, in the face of declining passenger numbers, nostalgia didn't pay the bills, and most routes were shut as proposed.

With those closures, staff numbers employed on the railways declined and arguably the status of railway work went with it. At the same time, changing systems and technology – the end of steam and the end of much freight service – plus the mechanisation of manual jobs, including aspects of track maintenance, altered the nature of railway work forever.

From the 1980s, British Rail (as it became in 1965) was something of a political punchbag for the Conservative government. As a nationalised industry – like coal – it sat uncomfortably with free-market ideology. Therefore from 1994 British Rail was sold off and privatised. The period after 1990 saw challenges and successes – some high-profile safety incidents, but also the construction and completion of 'High Speed 1' and the Channel Tunnel between Britain and France.

Absent From The Records

Thinking of our relations in the railway industry – particularly staff – it's valuable to ask who we miss in the story if we rely on the formal records produced that have made it into preservation. Most immediately, those who are still living and whose privacy is safeguarded by General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules leave little archival footprint (at the moment), although we can hopefully discuss their railway work with them in person.

As in other walks of life, the further back we go, the more that traditionally under-represented people and groups are hidden from view – they don't tend to make it into the archival record. That includes not only women and people of colour, but also LGBTQ+ people and disabled people. Sometimes these marginalised workers can be found in the records, if we spend time looking for them and are attuned to the nuances of the time in which the sources were written.

Railway 200 is an interesting moment, since it both looks backwards and considers the future of the industry. Events going on throughout Britain, including the touring exhibition train *Inspiration*, and resources available from the special website **railway200.co.uk**, have been set up with this bridge between past, present and future in mind. What will the railway of 2225 look like? Just as those in 1825 would have been hard pressed to imagine a future 200 years away, it's difficult to say – but the railways will still be here, staffed and used by our descendants.

Dr Mike Esbester is senior lecturer in history at the University of Portsmouth, and co-lead of the Railway Work, Life & Death project

Resources

Take your research further

ARCHIVES

MODERN RECORDS CENTRE

a **University Library, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL**
t 024 7652 4219
w **warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/**

The MRC holds the archives of such trade unions as the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.

NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND

a **HM General Register House, 2 Princes Street, Edinburgh EH1 3YY**
t 0131 202 0451
w **nrscotland.gov.uk**

Here you'll find staff registers and accident records for Scottish firms, plus Fatal Accident Inquiry records.

BOOKS

Railwaywomen
Helena Wojtczak
Hastings Press, 2005
Find out about female workers.

Tracing Your Railway Ancestors
Di Drummond
Pen & Sword, 2010
This is a very helpful introduction.

MUSEUMS

LOCOMOTION

a **Shildon, DL4 2RE**
t 033 0058 0058
w **locomotion.org.uk**

Locomotion is part of the Science Museum Group, like the NRM.

NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

a **Leeman Road, York YO26 4XJ**
t 033 0058 0058
w **railwaymuseum.org.uk**

Email *search.engine@railwaymuseum.org.uk* if you want to book a visit to consult archived records.

WEBSITE

RAILWAY WORK, LIFE & DEATH

w **railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk**

Search more than 115,000 records of pre-1939 accidents involving British and Irish workers. The site also has contextual resources, and a blog that welcomes contributions from family historians.

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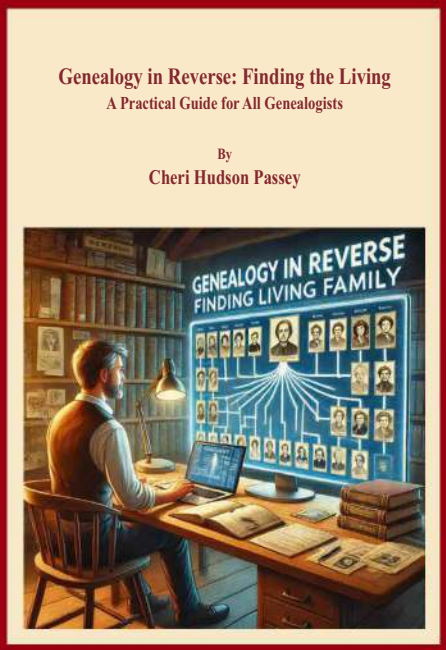

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UNCOVERING ARISTOCRATIC RELATIONS

Joanne Penn shares her insider knowledge of how genealogists prove – or disprove – family legends of aristocratic links

Many clients come to genealogists with family stories of connections to aristocratic families, or famous historic figures, that they want verified. These cases typically fall into two categories. First, the clients have been told that they are related to a specific person, or family, with whom they may, or may not, share a surname. Second, the story that has been handed down concerns an illegitimacy. The mother was said to be in service at "a big house" and the father a member of the gentry. How do we set about proving such links, and what are the challenges we face?

The first thing we are likely to discuss with our clients is taking a DNA test. Being able to work with DNA is an essential tool for genealogists these days, and it is particularly useful for determining the veracity of purported family ties. We will also warn the client that the story may not be true. It just takes one person to come up with a story, no doubt advantageous at the time, and a family legend is born. However, sometimes these stories do ultimately prove to be true so they are always worth investigating. ▶

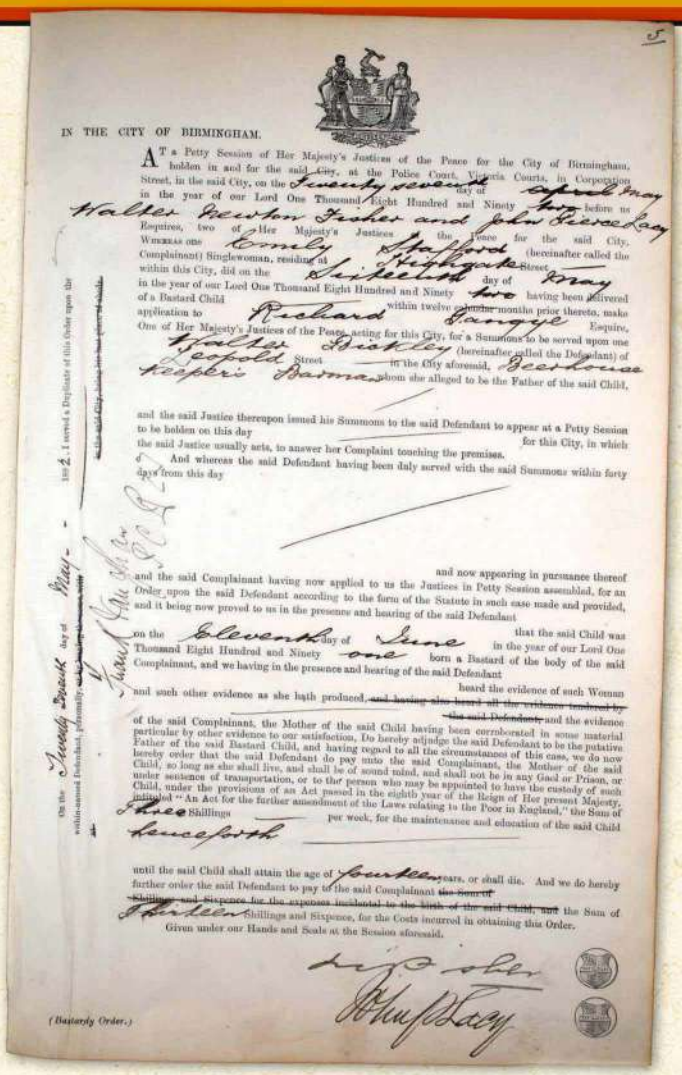
When trying to link a client's family to an aristocrat or similarly well-known person, we typically start by building out family trees for both the famous person and the client. Famous people often already have a tree online, but it is crucial that we independently verify such trees, because we all know how often mistakes are blindly repeated. We are obviously looking for relations in common, but we also pay attention to where the families were living. If we don't find the same people in both trees but note that the families were both in the same area, around the same time, we will focus on those people and places for more in-depth research.

Distance And Distortions

We always bear in mind that 'related to' doesn't necessarily mean 'descended from'. The connection can be distant and through marriage, rather than by blood. In addition, we have to consider that family stories can get distorted over time. For instance, the link may eventually prove to be on the maternal line, whereas the whole family were convinced it was on the paternal side. Or a name has been confused, so Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire has become Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the north-east, for example. If we don't find the connection where the family thought it was, it is important to consider other branches, and other interpretations of the 'facts'.

In the cases of illegitimacies linked to famous men, there is no doubt that some members of the aristocracy and gentry did take advantage of their female servants. But we should also consider that a single mother may have told her child that they had a noble father as a kindness, given the discrimination that they would certainly face because of their illegitimacy. Clients are often absolutely convinced that the family information is correct, and point to perceived resemblances in photos and paintings. However, ultimately the father sometimes turns out to have been the handsome stable lad instead!

Initially, we tackle these cases like any other involving unknown parentage. Illegitimate children were sometimes given their biological father's surname as a middle name, and some used both parents' surnames at different times of their lives. Therefore we will look for birth records, baptisms, school admissions, workhouse records, census returns, marriage records, apprenticeship indentures – any records that might name the


IN THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM.

At a Petty Session of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the City of Birmingham, holden in and for the said City, at the Police Court, Victoria Courts, in Corporation Street, in the said City, on the Twenty seventh day of April in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Ninety two before us Walter Newton Fisher and John Pierce Lang Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said City.

Whereas one Emily Stafford (hereinafter called the Complainant) Singlewoman, residing at Sutton Street within this City, did on the Twelfth day of May in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Ninety two having been delivered of a Bastard Child within twelve calendar months prior thereto, make application to Richard Barnett Esquire, One of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting for this City, for a Summons to be served upon one Walter Bickley (hereinafter called the Defendant) of Leopold Street in the City aforesaid, Beerhouse Keeper Barmaid whom she alleged to be the Father of the said Child,

and the said Justice thereupon issued his Summons to the said Defendant to appear at a Petty Session for this City, in which to be holden on this day the said Justice usually acts, to answer her Complaint touching the premises.

And whereas the said Defendant having been duly served with the said Summons within forty days from this day

and now appearing in pursuance thereof and the said Complainant having now applied to us the Justices in Petty Session assembled, for an Order upon the said Defendant according to the form of the Statute in such case made and provided, and it being now proved to us in the presence and hearing of the said Defendant

on the Eleventh day of June that the said Child was in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Ninety one born a Bastard of the body of the said Complainant, and we having in the presence and hearing of the said Defendant heard the evidence of such Woman and such other evidence as she hath produced, ~~and having also heard all the evidence tendered by the said Defendant~~ and the evidence of the said Complainant, the Mother of the said Child having been corroborated in some material particular by other evidence to our satisfaction, Do hereby adjudge the said Defendant to be the putative Father of the said Bastard Child, and having regard to all the circumstances of this case, we do now hereby order that the said Defendant do pay unto the said Complainant, the Mother of the said Child, so long as she shall live, and shall be of sound mind, and shall not be in any Gaol or Prison, or under sentence of transportation, or to the person who may be appointed to have the custody of such Child, under the provisions of an Act passed in the eighth year of the Reign of Her present Majesty, intitled "An Act for the further amendment of the Laws relating to the Poor in England," the Sum of Two Shillings per week, for the maintenance and education of the said Child henceforth

until the said Child shall attain the age of fourteen years, or shall die. And we do hereby further order the said Defendant to pay to the said Complainant ~~the Sum of Shillings and Sixpence for the expenses incidental to the birth of the said Child, and~~ the Sum of Twelve Shillings and Sixpence, for the Costs incurred in obtaining this Order.

Given under our Hands and Seals at the Session aforesaid.

(Bastardy Order.)

Bastardy orders such as this can reveal the name of the father of an illegitimate child

Which DNA Test – And Which Tester?

Joanne explains how to use DNA testing to prove your connection to an aristocratic family

The crucial factor that determines which test to take is the number of generations there are between the tester and the subject of the inquiry. If it is up to six generations, we generally recommend an autosomal test. These are offered by Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), MyHeritage (**myheritage.com**), the financially troubled 23andMe (**23andme.com/en-gb**) and FamilyTreeDNA (the Family Finder test; **familytreedna.com/products/family-finder**). The tester should be the person genetically closest to the person of interest. Therefore, if the client has an older relative on the right line, then we will usually suggest testing them instead.

If the gap is more than six generations, we can only consider testing Y-DNA or mitochondrial DNA. These tests are both offered by FamilyTreeDNA, but they are not suitable for every descendant, or every question. Since Y-DNA is passed from father to son only, we can only test direct-line male descendants. There needs to be an unbroken male line between the subject and the tester. It may be that there are no suitable males in the client's immediate family, but research can identify a more distant male cousin, who is suitable to test. This test can look back hundreds of years.

FamilyTreeDNA hosts a large number of Y-DNA surname projects, which people with the same surname, or similar DNA sequences, can join and compare their individual genetic codes to determine connections. Mitochondrial DNA is passed from mother to child, so everyone carries their mother's mitochondrial DNA, but from there, it only looks back over the direct female line. Mitochondrial DNA is incredibly stable, so can look back thousands of years, but is much less useful in pinpointing someone's precise ancestors.

father. Depending on when the child was born, we will also look for bastardy records, maintenance payments in overseers' accounts, records of bastardy orders being granted at quarter-session courts, or later of affiliation orders being sought at the petty-session courts, and of course any report of such cases in the local newspapers.

Any one of these records could reveal the father's name, but probably only if he was an ordinary man. The rich and famous would have wanted to avoid any scandal and were far more likely to have come to a private financial arrangement with the mother, in which case there may not be any mention of his name at all in official records. So, where else can we look?

Country-House Records

Clients often ask us to check the staff records for these big houses, but the reality is that unless you are looking at a very recent employment – in which case the records are probably still in private hands – then surviving household records rarely mention members of staff by name; it just wasn't important enough. Wages, appointments and dismissals may be recorded in household accounts, but usually the staff were referred to by their job title, rather than their name.

Instead, we will look for the reputed father and grandparent's wills, in case they acknowledged any illegitimate children or grandchildren. We will also search archive collections for the man's personal correspondence, or diaries that might have survived from the time of the pregnancy and the child's early years. We would be looking for any discussion of a personal "problem", or instructions to a solicitor to make unusual payments. We will also use these records to build up a timeline of where the man was around the time the child was conceived, to see if it was feasible that he might have been in the same place, at the same time, as the mother.

The Howard Surname Y-DNA Project

Joanne is looking for UK volunteers to help with a FamilyTreeDNA surname project

We are offering free Y-DNA testing for suitable candidates to join our Howard Surname Y-DNA project: **familytreedna.com/groups/howarddnaproject/**. Our objective is to link a group of Howards in the USA, who all descend from an early migrant to Virginia, to a Howard family in England. The Americans' family stories suggest that they descend from the Howards who hold the titles of the Duke of Norfolk, Earl of Arundel and Earl of Carlisle, and own properties such as Arundel Castle and Castle Howard. Members of that Howard family declined our invitation to take a Y-DNA test, so can you help?

If you are, or know of, a male Howard who you think connects to that Howard family, we would love to hear from you. We are also keen to hear from anyone whose family information is that they descend from these Howards, irrespective of their surname now. Finally, we are interested in testing male Howards who don't know of a connection to the family, but know that their Howard line has deep roots in Sussex, London, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, North Yorkshire or Derbyshire. We have lots of US testers who all show the same, or very similar, Y-DNA sequences to one another, but so far the Howards we have tested in the UK all have different sequences to the Americans, and to one another. So we need to widen our base of UK testers. If you're interested, please email *mail@jogeni.com* to find out more.

Miles Fitzalan-Howard, 17th Duke of Norfolk, in 1990

"But what about a DNA test?" I hear you ask. "Surely this is the easiest way to answer these questions?" Well yes, in the case of a famous person who came from a more ordinary background, there is a very good chance that DNA matches will provide a clear answer. However, it is usually a different matter altogether when it comes to proving a link to a member of the aristocracy. Generally, aristocratic families are very reluctant to take DNA tests. This is perhaps understandable; they are probably suspicious of people's motives. And imagine if it turned out that their great great grandmother had been fond of the stable lad too…

Generally, aristocratic families are very reluctant to take DNA tests

In the absence of good DNA matches, what more can we do? We need to look for descendants of lesser-known members of the family: of the sons who didn't inherit much, or illegitimate children whose parentage has been confirmed. Other generations of the family need to be explored for such members and, when identified, their lines need to be traced down to living descendants, who might be willing to take a test.

If we don't find suitable testers, all is not yet lost. We can embark on bigger projects such as Y-DNA surname projects to build up a better understanding of the sequence of the Y-DNA associated with certain surnames, and indeed the other surnames that men with that Y-DNA sequence have. However, such projects require considerable time and funds. You can learn more online, including from the International Society of Genetic Genealogy: **isogg.org/wiki/Surname_DNA_projects.**

Proving family relationships to aristocrats and other famous people is definitely challenging. Research can be highly complex and, as professionals, we need to bring all of our skills to the fore. However, they are also some of the most interesting and rewarding cases to work on.

JOANNE PENN has worked in genealogical and archival services for over 25 years, including five at Ancestry. Find out more at **jogeni.com**

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

'My Family Tree Is Full Of Scandal'

Gemma Duggan spent the Covid-19 lockdowns investigating her Wilson ancestors' misdemeanours and her grandfather's missing siblings. She also uncovered a murder attempt, says **Claire Vaughan**

Covid-19 has had a lasting impact on all our lives in one way or another, but when Gemma Duggan (née Lupton) developed long Covid after contracting the virus in 2020, she was forced to give up her job. While many of us were home-schooling or doing star jumps with Joe Wicks, she was putting her history degree to good use. "Mapping my family history has been a great way to keep my brain engaged," she says.

Gemma, who lives in Lichfield, Staffordshire, knew that she had some notable ancestors on her father's side – from artists to gentlemen and clergymen – but also discovered interesting stories from 'ordinary' folk behind closed doors, including a murder attempt, marriage scandals and the enigmatic Frances Pook.

Mary, covered in blood, claimed John had tried to 'murder them all'

Gemma inherited a vanity case full of family papers from her grandfather Reginald Thomas Wilson

It all started with an old vanity case that Gemma had been left by her maternal grandfather, Reginald Thomas Wilson, when he died in 2013. "It was kept closed with an old belt, and contained all the family papers." She began to sift through the contents. "I knew very little about this side, other than that they were based in Lincolnshire."

She came across Reginald's birth certificate, and was interested to see his birth mother's name – Frances Pook. "He'd never known her, having been taken from her by his father, Reginald Thomas Wilson senior, when he was less than two years old. I was keen to find out more about the mysterious Frances."

Gemma logged onto Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and uploaded some basic information. Her mum's cousin, John Dashwood, contacted her from New Zealand. "The work he'd done on the Wilson side was very helpful. We've collaborated over the past few years to put more pieces of the jigsaw together."

Using records of birth, marriage and death and the census, Gemma pushed back to her 3x great grandfather on her dad's side: John Sanders (1829–1897), who was born in Burlescombe, Devon. He married Love Chilcott in 1849; the couple settled in Tiverton and had 10 children. However, Love died in 1881 and three years later he married Mary Norish (born 1825). Checking the online newspaper archives to see if she could find out anything else about John, Gemma uncovered a rather dramatic news item.

"According to a report in the *Tiverton Gazette*, early on the morning of 18 February 1885, Mary came to her neighbours' door covered in blood and claimed John had tried to 'murder them all'. The neighbour went into Mary and John's house to make sure the children were safe, only to find John on the floor with a head wound and several stab wounds to the throat. Both were taken to hospital – Mary had lost a lot of blood, and John was in a critical condition. He apparently admitted to the doctor, 'My wife has been nagging me about Mrs Betty, and other women, and as she would not stop, I got angry and hit her on the head with my hammer. She retaliated and knocked me senseless.' John was charged with attempted murder.

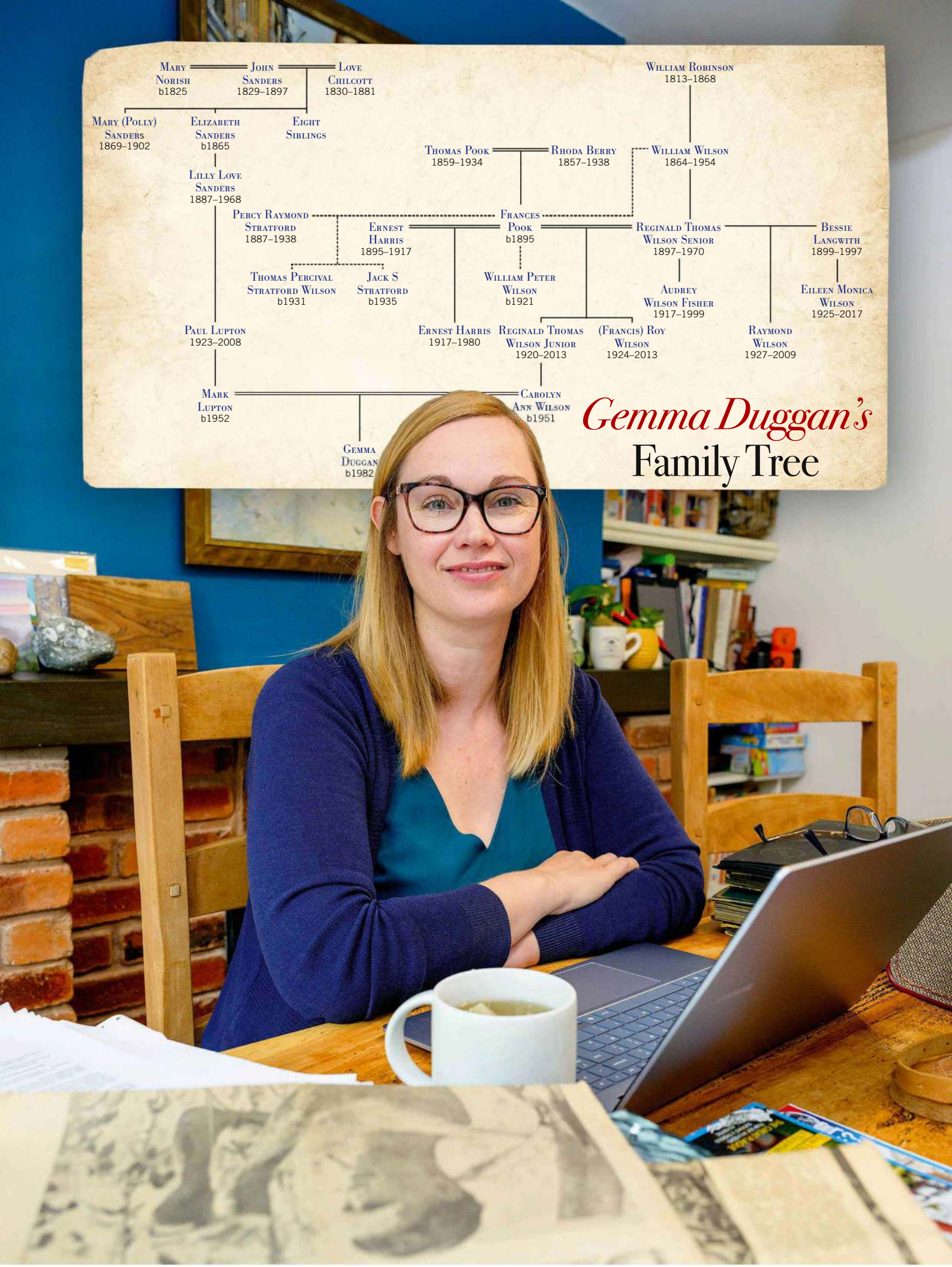
Blood-Stained Hammer

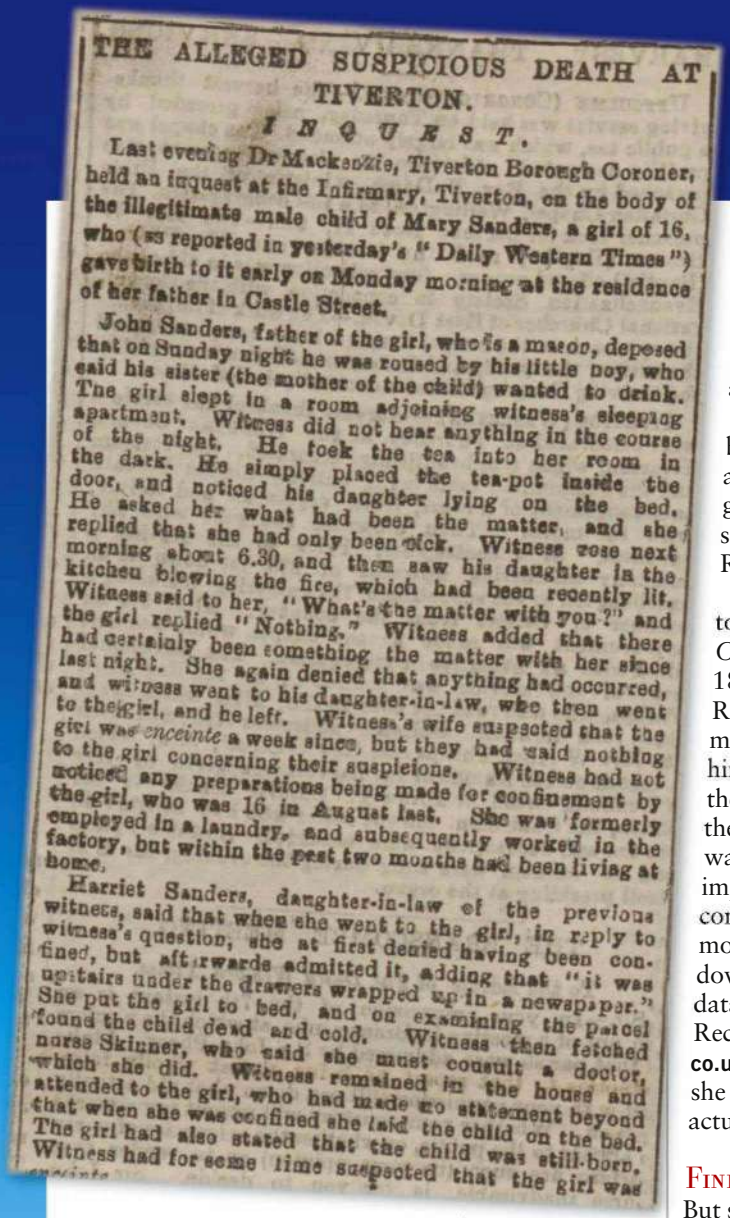
"When it went to trial, the courtroom was packed, and a gasp went up when the 'blood-stained hammer' was shown as evidence." John was apparently drunk at the time of the event and, having promised to stay sober, was let off with a fine.

The family appeared in the newspapers again on 14 ▶

UNP/RICHARD GRANGE

Gemma Duggan's Family Tree





THE ALLEGED SUSPICIOUS DEATH AT TIVERTON.

INQUEST.

Last evening Dr Mackenzie, Tiverton Borough Coroner, held an inquest at the Infirmary, Tiverton, on the body of the illegitimate male child of Mary Sanders, a girl of 16, who (as reported in yesterday's "Daily Western Times") gave birth to it early on Monday morning at the residence of her father in Castle Street.

John Sanders, father of the girl, who is a mason, deposed that on Sunday night he was roused by his little boy, who said his sister (the mother of the child) wanted to drink. The girl slept in a room adjoining witness's sleeping apartment. Witness did not hear anything in the course of the night. He took the tea into her room in the dark. He simply placed the tea-pot inside the door, and noticed his daughter lying on the bed. He asked her what had been the matter, and she replied that she had only been sick. Witness rose next morning about 6.30, and then saw his daughter in the kitchen blowing the fire, which had been recently lit. Witness said to her, "What's the matter with you?" and the girl replied "Nothing." Witness added that there had certainly been something the matter with her since last night. She again denied that anything had occurred, and witness went to his daughter-in-law, who then went to the girl, and he left. Witness's wife suspected that the girl was *enceinte* a week since, but they had said nothing to the girl concerning their suspicions. Witness had not noticed any preparations being made for confinement by the girl, who was 16 in August last. She was formerly employed in a laundry, and subsequently worked in the factory, but within the past two months had been living at home.

Harriet Sanders, daughter-in-law of the previous witness, said that when she went to the girl, in reply to witness's question, she at first denied having been confined, but afterwards admitted it, adding that "it was upstairs under the drawers wrapped up in a newspaper." She put the girl to bed, and on examining the parcel found the child dead and cold. Witness then fetched nurse Skinner, who said she must consult a doctor, which she did. Witness remained in the house and attended to the girl, who had made no statement beyond that when she was confined she laid the child on the bed. The girl had also stated that the child was still-born. Witness had for some time suspected that the girl was enceinte

Gemma discovered the tragic case of a stillborn baby in an 1885 newspaper

▶ October that year, in an article in the *Western Times* headlined "The Alleged Suspicious Death at Tiverton". It begins: "Last evening Dr Mackenzie, Tiverton Borough Coroner, held an inquest at the Infirmary, Tiverton, on the body of the illegitimate male child of Mary Sanders, a girl of 16, who… gave birth to it early on Monday morning at the residence of her father in Castle Street." Having kept her pregnancy a secret, Mary had the baby while the rest of the family slept. She claimed that her son was stillborn, and wrapped the body in newspaper.

The report goes on: "Harriet Skinner, midwife, residing in Barrington Street, stated that she was called to see the girl about eight o'clock. She was shown the child under the [chest of] drawers. It was dead and cold, but she did not notice any marks of violence on the body."

The jury returned a verdict of death by natural causes. However, Gemma says that when Mary was found guilty of concealing the birth, "She ended up with more time in jail than her father served for attacking his wife.

"The most scandalous and bizarre story, though, was about another of my 3x great grandfathers on the maternal side of my family, William Robinson (1813–1868)."

Gemma found a reference to him in the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* dated 13 March 1840. She explains, "William Robinson pleaded guilty to a misdemeanour committed by him at Spalding, Lincolnshire, the grand jury having ignored the bill for capital offence, and was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment including solitary confinement for the first six months." When she tracked down his entry in Ancestry's dataset 'UK, Prison Commission Records, 1770–1951' at **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61810/**, she was shocked to see that his actual crime was bestiality.

Findng Frances

But she kept going back to the name Frances Pook on her grandfather's birth certificate, gradually chipping away at the brick wall to reveal more of the complicated story of his birth mother and the siblings he probably never knew he had.

"The documents in the vanity case were my starting point. As well as birth, marriage and death certificates, there were some scraps of paper and scribbles on the back of photos, which were useful later once I had more context. The official records helped confirm dates and names of Frances' children. But as Frances had changed her name several times, this wasn't enough to build the full picture.

"My grandfather was born in 1920 in Tiverton poorhouse and grew up with his father, Reg senior, his 'stepmother', Bessie Langwith, and two half-siblings in Boston, Lincolnshire. He knew that Bessie wasn't his mother, but it was never discussed openly, and I only found out after her death.

"Reginald Wilson senior and Frances Pook met in London during the First World War, when she was a nurse and he

Left to right: Reginald Thomas Wilson senior, and William Wilson and his wife Elizabeth

Gemma's family archive includes many old photos

was a soldier recovering after being gassed." Frances was a war widow with one small child, Ernest Harris. Reg senior's service records show that he had a daughter born out of wedlock, Audrey Fisher, who Gemma spotted in a holiday photo from the vanity case. Audrey's mother was Florence May Fisher, who he met when he worked as a footman and she worked as a maid.

Frances and Reg senior married and after Reg, another child came along. "Frances had a son, William Peter, in Islington poorhouse in 1921. No father was listed. By this time, Reg senior had met Bessie and they were living together. Reg junior was with Bessie's mother in Boston."

Gemma's relatives in New Zealand and Lincolnshire were able to shed some light on this period in Frances' life. "They had all heard the same story: she'd had an affair with Reg senior's father, William Wilson. It appears that William Peter was William's child; she and Reg separated."

William Peter, along with Frances' first son, Ernest, were raised by her parents in Tiverton. "She and Reg senior briefly reconciled and she had another child, (Francis) Roy Wilson, with him, born in Plymouth. Frances and Reg senior separated again, and Roy was raised in part by Frances and partly in care."

DNA Surprise

After the separation, Reg settled down with Bessie in Boston. "They had two more children together, Eileen and Raymond, who were raised alongside my grandfather. However, DNA evidence has now shown that Reg wasn't Eileen's father, so Bessie must also have had another relationship in the 1920s."

It was a very complex family, and Gemma thought she had lost track of her great grandmother completely between the late 1920s and the 1940s. She continued to research her children's lives, however, and found that Roy Wilson had been a prisoner of war during the Second World War. A letter from the Air Ministry in Roy's POW files – along with the death notice of Frances' mother, Rhoda Pook – revealed that Frances had remained in Tiverton and used the surname Stratford.

"Further news reports and birth documents showed that she was living with Percy Raymond Stratford, who'd been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, as his wife. They had two children together, Thomas and Jack. Sadly, Frances was widowed again in 1938. The 1939 Register, along with articles in local newspapers, suggested that she raised her youngest boys herself."

One of the final records relating to Frances came from 1949. "She placed an advert in the local paper stating, 'Wanted; Work in evenings after 5.30pm, will do anything.' She must have been struggling financially."

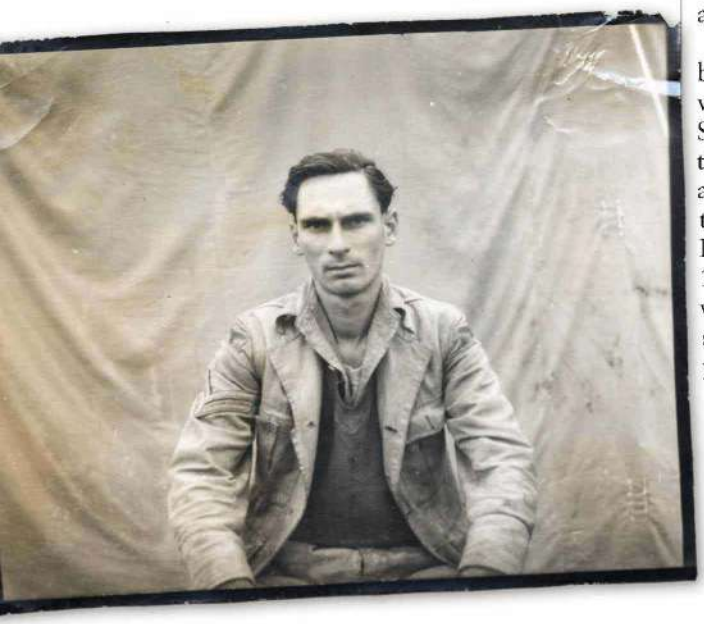
"I feel sad my grandfather never knew some of his siblings," says Gemma, "but he was loved and a very happy man, so maybe it worked out for the best.

"Exploring history through the eyes of individual lives gives us a richness of understanding of real people. Some of my ancestors I'm proud of, some I'm amused by, some I'm a little shocked by – but I find them all fascinating."

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*



Reginald Thomas Wilson junior

UNP/RICHARD GRANGE

Resources

These resources helped Gemma research her family's lives

BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

Coroners' reports, death notices, classified ads, court accounts – Gemma has used all of these items, which she found at the BNA, to break down her Pook brick wall and give her a more rounded view of her ancestors. You can also search the now more than 93.8 million pages, dating back to the 1700s, via Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) with an 'Everything' subscription.

DNA TESTING

DNA is being increasingly used in genealogy to fill in the gaps when the paper trail goes cold. In order to verify what had happened to her grandfather's missing siblings, Gemma contacted some of her Wilson relatives and asked them to take DNA tests so that they could double-check some of the links.

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS

Portraits and other photos can offer clues to brick walls. Check them for notes of dates or places that you can cross-reference with other records. Gemma realised that one of her grandfather's half-siblings Audrey Fisher had holidayed with the family from pictures that he left her. If you don't know the date of a photo, you can always submit it to the magazine's 'Q&A' section (see page 43 for details).

FOCUS ON

The Court of Chancery in session at the Palace of Westminster, c1725

Chancery Court Records

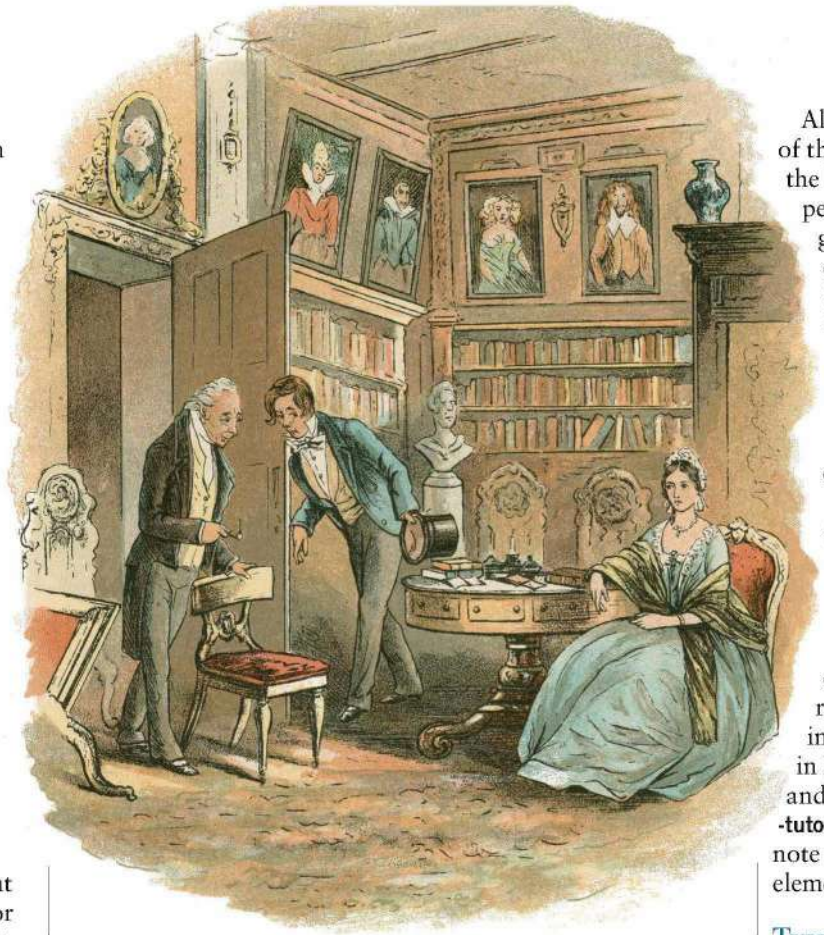
Susan Moore shares her tips for making the most of these crucial documents at The National Archives

GETTY IMAGES

Looking at proceedings from the Chancery Court, which are held by The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**), is like shining a torch back into people's lives in past centuries. No other source gives such a personal insight, except perhaps letters. No other source can give so much genealogical information, with several generations often outlined in one document, recording names, relationships and sometimes even exact dates. The rich and the poor used the Chancery Court, although as a rule of thumb it is generally the type of family who might leave a will, ie those who owned a small amount of property whether land or goods, who tended to use it. Agricultural labourers and servants seldom appear as parties in Chancery records. However, they are often called as witnesses, or are referred to in the text, or feature in accounts that are submitted as evidence.

The Chancery Court was one of the courts of equity in England and Wales that came into being in the late 14th century. These were used by ordinary citizens to bring a civil case against another citizen. They were courts where "the first object in enquiry in Equity is the defendant's conscience rather than the plaintiff's right", as explained by Sir Robert Atkyns in his seminal *An Enquiry into the Jurisdiction of the Chancery in Causes of Equity* (1695).

The judgments aimed to be what a good and moral person would do, which, as today, is not necessarily the same as what is right in a strict legal sense.



The lawyer Tulkinghorn visits Lady Dedlock in one of Phiz's illustrations from Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852–1853), about a long-running Chancery case

The judgments aimed to be what a good and moral person would do

Although there are records of the Chancery Court from the late 14th century, the period for which they are a gold mine of genealogical detail extends from the middle of the 16th century to the late 19th century. The joy of these records for family historians is that, unlike most other courts, the records of the courts of equity are written in English, and written by a clerk so the handwriting is fairly uniform and legible. TNA has a good online tutorial about reading the handwriting in documents written in English between 1500 and 1800 at **tinyurl.com/tna-tutorial-handwriting**, although note that the interactive elements no longer work.

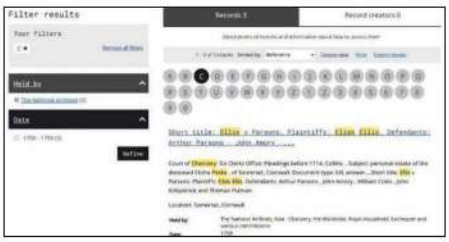
Types Of Dispute

Disputes tend to fall into two very broad categories: unpaid debts and the possession of property, the latter generally being more informative and interesting particularly when there is a dispute over a will or a marriage settlement. The case starts with the plaintiff setting out their grievance, usually with a long background history that will include a great deal of information that can ▶

How To Find Chancery Records

Susan explains how to locate Chancery records at The National Archives using its catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**)

1 On the homepage click the 'Advanced search' link. Enter the name(s) of the person you're looking for, the word 'chancery', and an optional location. For series, type 'C'.



2 You can sort search results by relevance, reference, title or date. Here Elias Ellis is the plaintiff in one record, defendant in another, and merely mentioned in the third.

3 Click on the entry for the full description. The brief summary shown here reveals that the case is Ellis vs Parsons, but concerns the will of Elisha Pecke.

GETTY IMAGES

help a family historian; this is known as the Bill of Complaint. Different people of the same name are described so that you can be sure that one John Smith is the uncle/father/cousin of another one, thus helping with one of the greatest problems that genealogists face. In some cases I have seen up to five generations described, with numerous children listed at each level, plus names of wives, and often with dates of marriage and death, and frequently with the same name occurring many times for different people.

DID YOU KNOW?

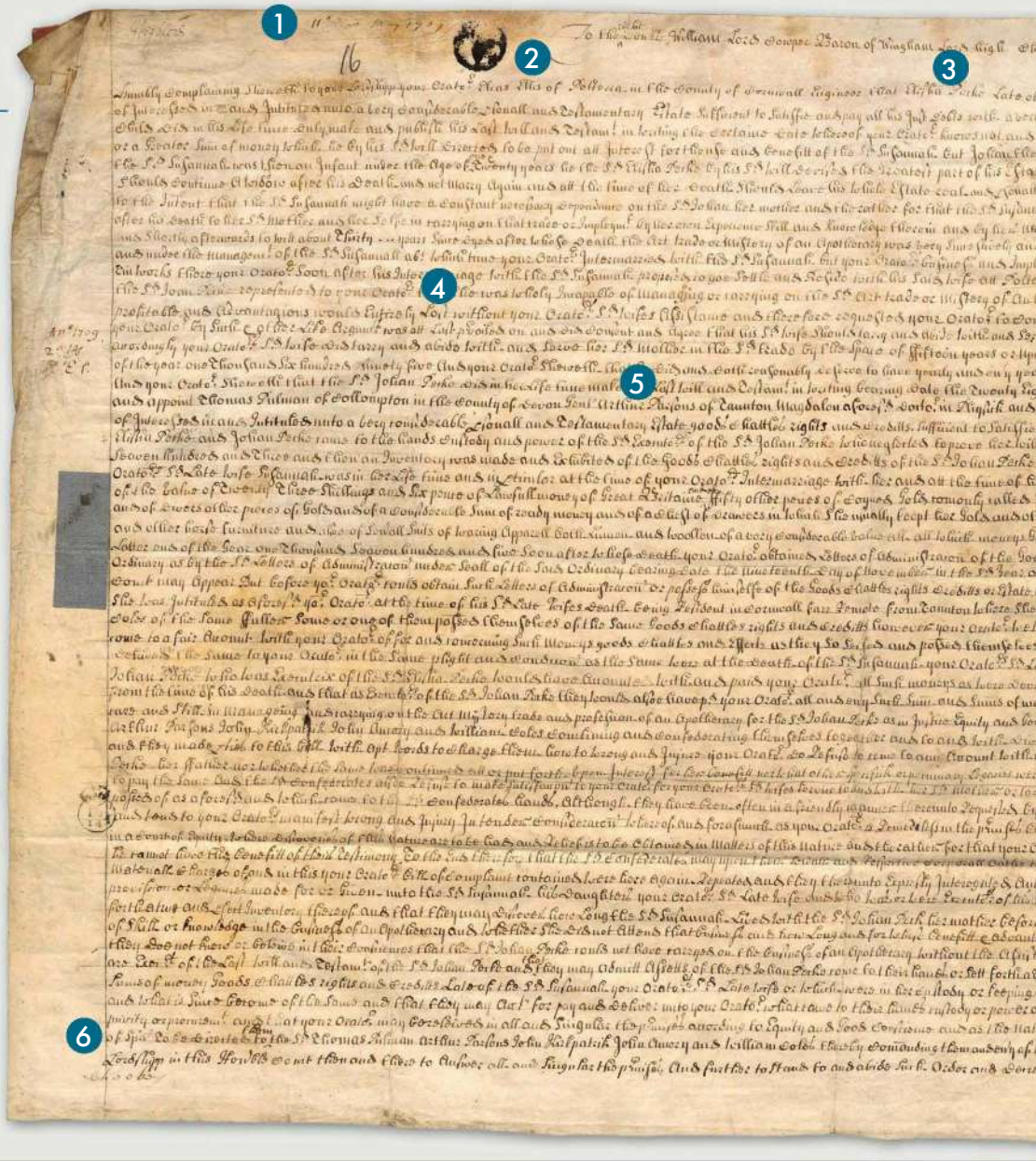
Chancery cases are one of the few sources that tell you about women and children, because they are almost as likely as men to be involved as parties or witnesses.

Defendants' Names

Once the background has been established, the body of the case is introduced with the words "Now so it is may it please your lordship…" leading at the end of the document to the names of the defendants with the words "May it therefore please your lordship the premises considered to grant unto your orator his Majesty's most gracious writ of subpoena to be directed unto…".

When reading the Bill of Complaint it is easy to be very sympathetic to the plaintiff, believing that they have been seriously wronged by the defendant. The next document is the defendant's Answer, which often makes you think, "Ah, so there is a bit more to it." In the

Bill Of Complaint, 1709



1 Date
The date of the Bill is given at top left: 11 May 1709.

2 Plaintiff
The first line of the main body of the record reveals that "Elias Ellis of Polterra in the County of Cornwall engineer" is "humbly complaining". Virtually all Bills of Complaint start with that phrase.

3 Plaintiff's Relations
A number of Elias' relatives are listed: apothecary Elisha Pecke of Taunton Magdalen (first line), his father in law; his only daughter Susannah (right-hand side of the second line); and "Johan the wife of the said Elisha Pecke" (middle of the fourth line).

4 Susannah
Elias' wife is described as "wholly incapable of carrying on the said art trade or mystery of an apothecary"; the Bill implies that people might have been able to take advantage of her.

5 Will
Johan's will was dated 28 December 1695, and she passed away in December 1703 (line 27).

6 Defendants
The defendants are only named as such at the end when the plaintiff asks for a subpoena to be directed to them.

Answer the defendant will work through the points raised by the plaintiff, often adding new information about the family and its background. The language in the Bill and Answer is not quite colloquial, because it is written by lawyers, but there is a real feeling of hearing the parties speaking, and indeed in many cases they will quote actual words of who said what and when.

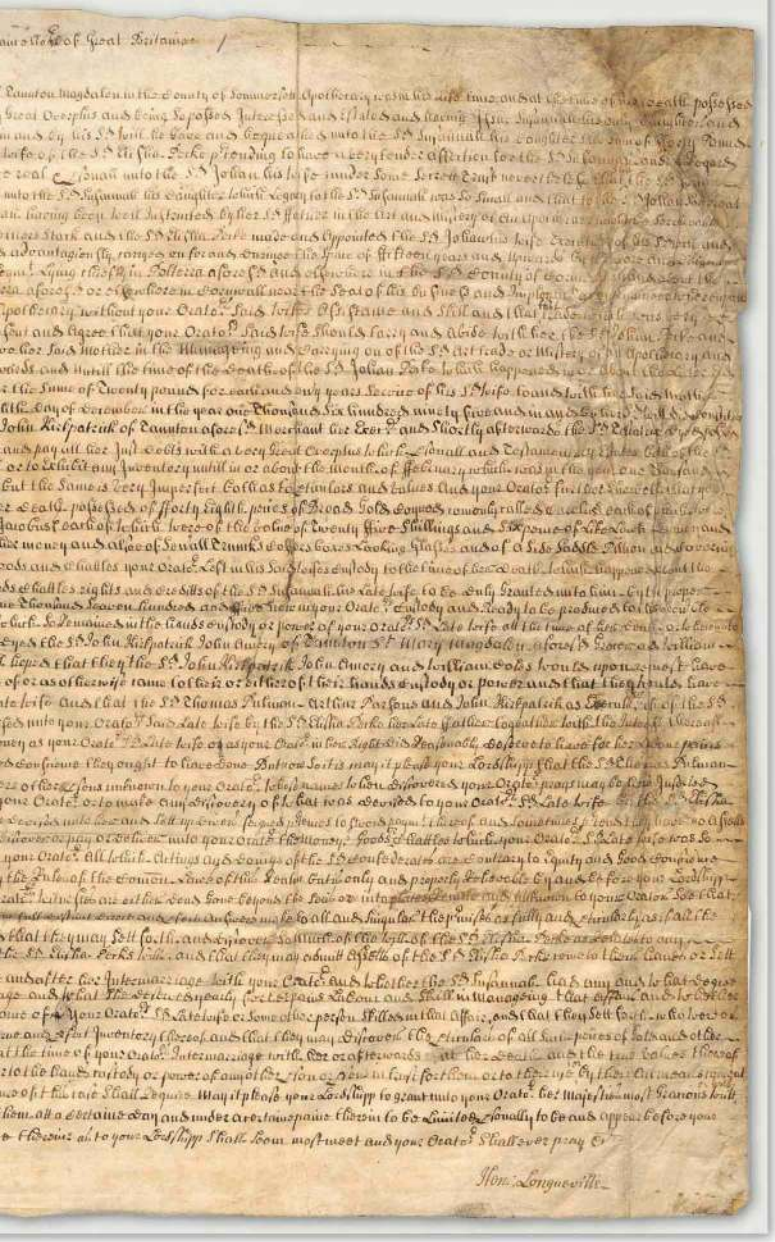
The plaintiff and defendant can then each compile a list of questions, known as Interrogatories, to be put to chosen witnesses. These 'Deponents' then give their answers or depositions to the questions relevant to them. For those outside London the answers to these questions are usually taken down in the local pub and written out almost verbatim. The value of these records is that each witness is named with his or her occupation and age. Whereas the parties in a case are usually of a certain social standing, deponents can often be agricultural labourers. The first question they are usually asked is how long they have known the parties. An answer such as "10 years when I moved to this parish from the parish of…" can be an invaluable indication as to where people came from and how long they have lived in a parish.

With the Chancery Court there was no verbal hearing in court, no cross-examination, no verbal judgment – all of the records were written down, and most survive for us to look at now. Written judgment was given by the Lord Chancellor after reading the summary of the case prepared by the Master, one of the court officials.

Settled Cases

Having said this, it must be pointed out that many cases do not get this far. Most do not get beyond the Bill and Answer stage, leading no doubt to a settlement out of court. The Master could also ask for exhibits such as deeds, marriage settlements, wills and accounts to be brought to court. Occasionally these were left behind after the end of the case, and now form the wonderful collection of Masters Exhibits. ▶

Elias Ellis wanted a large share of his late wife's estate, which had been taken over by the executors. This record is held by The National Archives (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**)



Sir Derek Jacobi

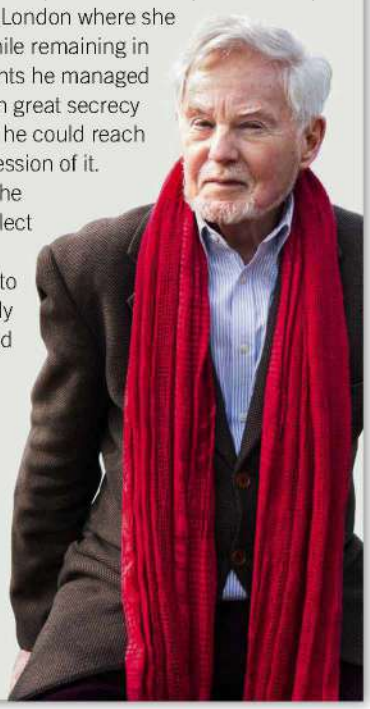
When the thespian researched his tree on *WDYTYA?* a vital record of a case at the Chancery Court shed light on his French ancestry

Acting legend Sir Derek Jacobi was the subject of an episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* in August 2015. His 6x great grandfather Joseph de la Playn was a Protestant refugee from France who had escaped to London, and in 1703 he brought a Chancery case that revealed his history.

In April 1690 Joseph was planning to flee from persecution in France, and wanted to get his money out of the country and into England. He enlisted the aid of a friend, another Protestant who wanted to leave France. Joseph helped Jane de Beynac to escape via Geneva and Amsterdam to London where she arrived in September 1691, while remaining in France himself. Using merchants he managed to get his money sent to Jane in great secrecy between 1691 and 1701, until he could reach London himself and take possession of it.

When Joseph finally arrived he immediately visited Jane to collect the money. However, she then claimed that he had promised to marry her, which he vehemently denied, and that the money had been sent to her for her own use, or at least so that they could be married.

Joseph arranged for her to be arrested and imprisoned for four months, and asked the Chancery judge to order her to pay him his money to fulfil its role of doing what a good man of moral conscience would do.



The Court of Chancery in session at Lincoln's Inn Hall, Holborn, 1808

After reading the pleadings, the Bill and the Answer, and any Masters Exhibits, the next stage is to look at the peripheral documents. The disadvantage to these is that there is nothing in TNA's catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**) to help you find papers relating to your relation's case. The first ones to look at are the Orders and Decrees, the judgments made during the case. The calendars to the Orders and Decrees are on the open shelves at TNA; these are chronological lists arranged by year then by legal term and then by the first letter of the surname of the principal plaintiff giving just the names of the two principal parties, such as "Smith v Jones", but the documents themselves need to be ordered.

Chancery Court documents give an insight into your ancestors' way of life

Finding Affidavits

In the 19th century the most useful records are the Affidavits which are statements by independent parties, often with more than 20 to a case, all with new information. To find an Affidavit is a little complicated, but worth the effort. The first step is to find one referred to in an Order. The calendar for the appropriate year then needs to be ordered as a document, and having found the entry with an item number, the actual Affidavit can be ordered. However, these are not kept on site so need to be ordered a week in advance.

In addition to the potential genealogical information in Chancery Court documents, they give a fascinating insight into your ancestors' way of life. The cases involving debt often refer to merchants and tradesmen and can show how far afield they traded, in some cases overseas including America. All of the cases show how friendship and trust can soon turn into conflict and enmity.

TOP TIP!

The opening lines of a Bill of Complaint has a clause, often preceded by "whereas", that records up to five generations of a family including names, dates, and details of wills.

SUSAN MOORE is a researcher specialising in Chancery records

Resources

Take your research further

BOOKS

Researching With English Court Records
SE Brown, L Flannigan and J Newman (eds)
Routledge, forthcoming
This upcoming book includes a chapter by Susan that discusses the records of the equity courts.

Tracing Your Ancestors in the National Archives: the Website and Beyond, 7th Edn
Amanda Bevan
PRO Publications, 2006
This guide was written by a senior archivist at TNA.

Tracing Your Ancestors Through the Equity Courts
Susan T Moore
Pen & Sword, 2017
Susan's research guide is aimed at local, social and family historians.

WEBSITES

FAMILYSEARCH
w **familysearch.org/en/wiki/England_Chancery_Court_Records**
FamilySearch's wiki has a good entry on Chancery records, although much of the information about online cataloguing is out date.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
w **tinyurl.com/tna-guide-chancery**
TNA's 'Civil Court Cases: Chancery Equity Suits 1558–1875' is the best quick research guide to the many series of documents. 'Civil Court Cases: Chancery Division Since 1875' is TNA's guide to subsequent records, and essential for research in the late 19th and 20th centuries because nothing is included in Discovery after 1875: **tinyurl.com/tna-guide-chancery-post-1875**.

GETTY IMAGES

The 17th-century Llandoger Trow in King Street, Bristol, photographed in 1941

Pubs And Breweries

Jonathan Scott steps behind the bar to explore websites for finding brewers and publicans

From the mid-16th century, anyone running an inn or alehouse needed permission from the justices of the peace. Later, landlords were required to pledge not to allow disorderly conduct in their establishments – a legal promise that was known as a recognizance or bond. These types of records are usually found in county record offices.

Where they survive, brewery records may either remain with the brewery or have been deposited with local archives or museums. Other valuable sources for research include trade directories, street directories, electoral registers, and property-related documents such as valuation records and rate books. Remember too that larger breweries often bought pubs and 'tied' them into only selling their beer. This means that references to individual establishments or publicans may well survive within a wider brewery archive.

Given the vast range of potential sources in multiple locations, a good starting point is The National Archives' catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**), which can help you find both local and national records.

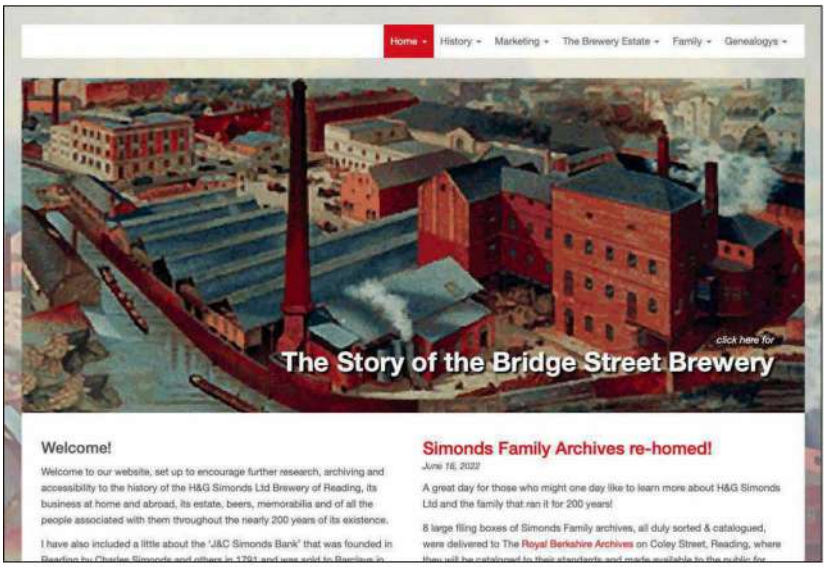
GUINNESS ARCHIVE

W **guinness-storehouse.com/en/archives**

The global brand's story began in 1755 when Arthur Guinness started brewing in Leixlip, County Kildare. Four years later he moved to Dublin, signing a 9,000-year lease on a disused brewery at St James's Gate. This website includes an extensive free database of past employees and customers, stretching back to the late 18th century: **guinness-storehouse.com/en/discover/your-story**. The data is taken from sources that include wages books, attendance registers, pension books, military-service records and records of dependants, and scans of some of the records are available. A search by the surname 'Warren', for example, led to a handwritten entry in a Clerks' Salary Book (1843–1863). The material is also on Ancestry: **tinyurl.com/anc-guinness**.

GETTY IMAGES

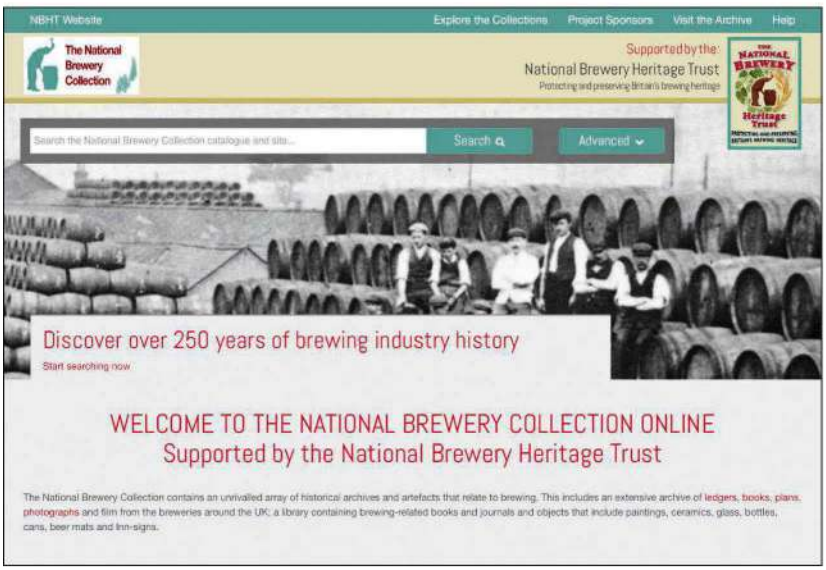
BEST WEBSITES



SIMONDS FAMILY WEBSITE

w **simondsfamily.me.uk**

This homespun site brings together an enormous amount of information on Reading brewery H&G Simonds Ltd. It was founded in Broad Street by William Blackall Simonds in 1785, but just five years later moved to a larger, purpose-built complex on Bridge Street. Highlights include 12,000 searchable pages from staff newsletters and publications such as the *Hop Leaf Gazette*. Via the 'Brewery People' page at **simondsfamily.me.uk/history/brewery-people/** you can explore images of staff taken from the company archives in Bristol. You can also read about the family's own collections, which are now with the Royal Berkshire Archives (**royalberkshirearchives.org.uk**).



THE NATIONAL BREWERY COLLECTION

w **nbcarchives.co.uk**

The closure of the National Brewery Heritage Trust's National Brewery Centre in Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire, in 2022 means that the archives won't be available to researchers for the foreseeable future. However, the website remains a useful place to find out more about the development of the market town as the "brewing capital of the world". Material held by the trust include ledgers, books, plans, photos and films, as well as artefacts and ephemera. The majority relate to the Bass Brewery – the collection began as part of the opening of the Bass Museum in 1977. There are pages on farming, transport, science and technology, and the development of public houses.

EXPERT'S CHOICE

Sam Cullen is the author of *London's Lost Pubs* (Pen & Sword, 2025)

The Irwell Castle in Whit Lane, Salford, photographed on 6 August 1973 – the building has since been demolished

When researching pubs and breweries, I feel people should be at the very heart of the story. That's why I've found the Lost Pubs Project (**closedpubs.co.uk**) such a useful resource.

It has a simple, unassuming interface, but is packed full of insight about more than 45,000 closed pubs across the UK, and includes over 33,800 photos. It is a site driven by user input so some pubs inevitably have more information recorded about them than others, although you will generally find that most establishments are recorded here to one degree or another.

The website proved to be invaluable when I researched my own book on the topic, which was published earlier this year. For many of the pubs I featured, the site was a treasure trove of colourful testimonies, helping to bring many a closed pub firmly back to life, in my imagination at least.

In particular, it was great to see that many former landlords and members of staff have shared their contact details online for interested parties to get in touch. For example, I reached out to the daughter of the landlord of the Shuckburgh Arms in Chelsea, West London, in the 1970s, who kindly sent me press cuttings about how the family's pet dog used to help walk sozzled locals home at closing time.

It was great to connect with her, and be alerted to such a wonderful story which epitomises the quirky life of pubs. To me this in a nutshell is what the Lost Pubs Project is all about, and I thoroughly recommend that you check it out.

GETTY IMAGES

THE PUB HISTORY SOCIETY

w **pubhistorysociety.co.uk**

The society, which celebrates its 25th birthday next year, remains an excellent starting point for people researching publicans or individual pubs. Via the 'Research' web page at **pubhistorysociety.co.uk/research.html** you can download a guide to tracing pub-worker relations. There are also longer articles that explain the mechanics of the trade. Specifically you can learn about the laws that were passed to regulate pubs and brewers, and the kinds of records these left behind. This includes the 1830 Beer Act, various licensing Acts (of 1828, 1872, 1904 and 1910), and the 'Recognizances and certificates of good character' system administered by local magistrates.

SCOTTISH BREWING HERITAGE

w **scottishbrewingheritage.org**

The secret of Scotland's proud brewing heritage is apparently "high quality grain, abundant water, an entrepreneurial attitude, and an uncrushable belief that we could do it better than anyone else", according to this website from Brewing Heritage Scotland. The site celebrates this spirit through a growing digital archive best explored using the yellow menu bar along the top of the screen, giving options of 'Businesses', 'Buildings', 'Places' and 'Objects'. Click 'Businesses' and then the 'Map View' option to see firms pinned across the country. Clicking one will give you the name, years active, plus biographies with links to any other connected breweries or buildings.

Go Further

More sites that you can't afford to miss

BREWERY HISTORY SOCIETY

w **breweryhistory.com**

The society's 'Breweryopedia' has 55,870 pages of text and photos relating to UK breweries.

GENGUIDE

w **tinyurl.com/gen-guide-pubs**

"The genealogists' guide to reference sources and research material" details the records that may survive for breweries, victuallers and pubs.

HISTORICAL DIRECTORIES OF ENGLAND & WALES

w **tinyurl.com/uni-leic-sco**

Trade and street directories are full of references to inns, alehouses, pubs and breweries.

NATIONAL BREWING LIBRARY

w **brookes.ac.uk/nbl/**

Oxford Brookes University preserves the libraries of the British Beer and Pub Association and the Institute of Brewing and Distilling.

PUBWIKI

w **pubwiki.co.uk**

This is a treasure trove of English pub history.

SCOTTISH BREWING ARCHIVE ASSOCIATION

w **scottishbrewingarchive.co.uk**

The association's archive is held by the University of Glasgow.

THE LABOLOGIST'S SOCIETY

w **labology.org.uk**

The website of the society for those interested in beer labels and brewing research includes a gallery of labels. There's also the British Beermat Collectors Society (**britishbeermats.org**).

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF BREWERS

w **tinyurl.com/brewers-hall-archives**

Find out about the early history of the company.

WARWICKSHIRE VICTUALLERS

w **tinyurl.com/warwickshire-victuallers**

This searchable database covers 1801–1828.

Post Office Establishment Books

The Postal Museum's **Susannah Coster** explains how to use this valuable digital collection to research your Post Office forebear

The establishment books are a rich source of information on Post Office staff. They are held in series POST 59 in The Royal Mail Archive on the first floor of The Postal Museum in Central London (**postalmuseum.org/collections/the-archive/**). They cover a long period: 1691–1985. They include all of the UK and, until 1920, Ireland as well. Some even include the small number of British Post Offices and agencies abroad. They are public records, and available for anyone to view on request. The establishment books from 1691–1979 are also available on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62454/**).

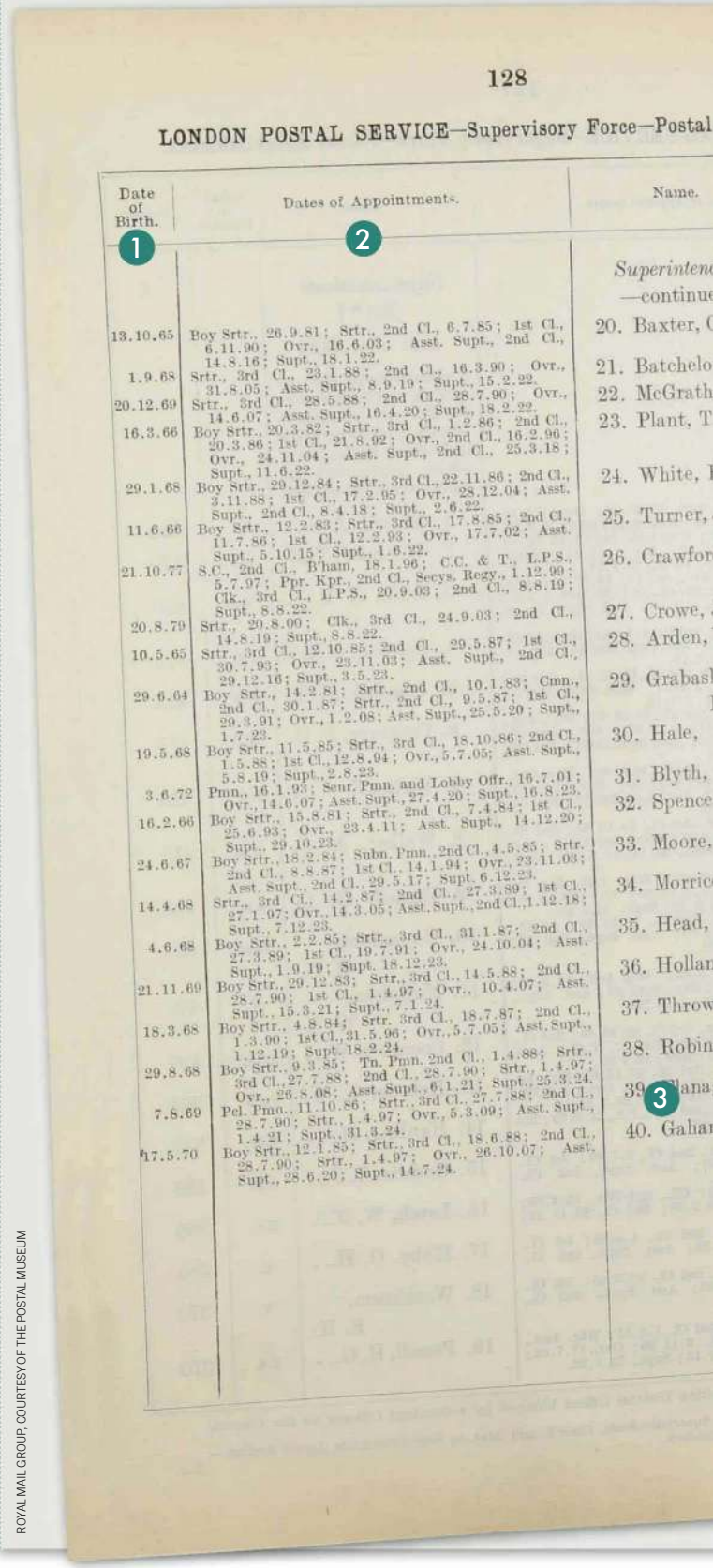
The Post Office was a government department up until 1969, and its 'established' staff were civil servants. They worked in the equivalent of today's permanent roles and, depending on the era, received benefits such as sick pay and a pension. 'Unestablished' staff, equivalent to today's seasonal or casual workers and often part time, received fewer benefits, at least until things started to change in the late 1800s. As you might expect, the establishment books include records of established staff. Since the Post Office was a major British employer during the 19th and 20th centuries, its records are an excellent source for many family historians' relations.

17th-Century Origin

The very first establishment book was created in 1691, and names just 20 established officers. Likewise, only a small number are listed in Queen Anne's Establishment Book of 1702, which recorded information about state offices and departments. By the mid-18th century the format of the establishment books starts to look more like later publications, with details of staff name, office, job title and salary. As the Post Office grew and took on more responsibilities and staff, more departments were added, so that by the 1930s there were 17 categories shown in the books. These include all of the senior staff, staff working in telephones, engineering, money orders, ▶

The Post Office was a major British employer during the 19th and 20th centuries

Establishment



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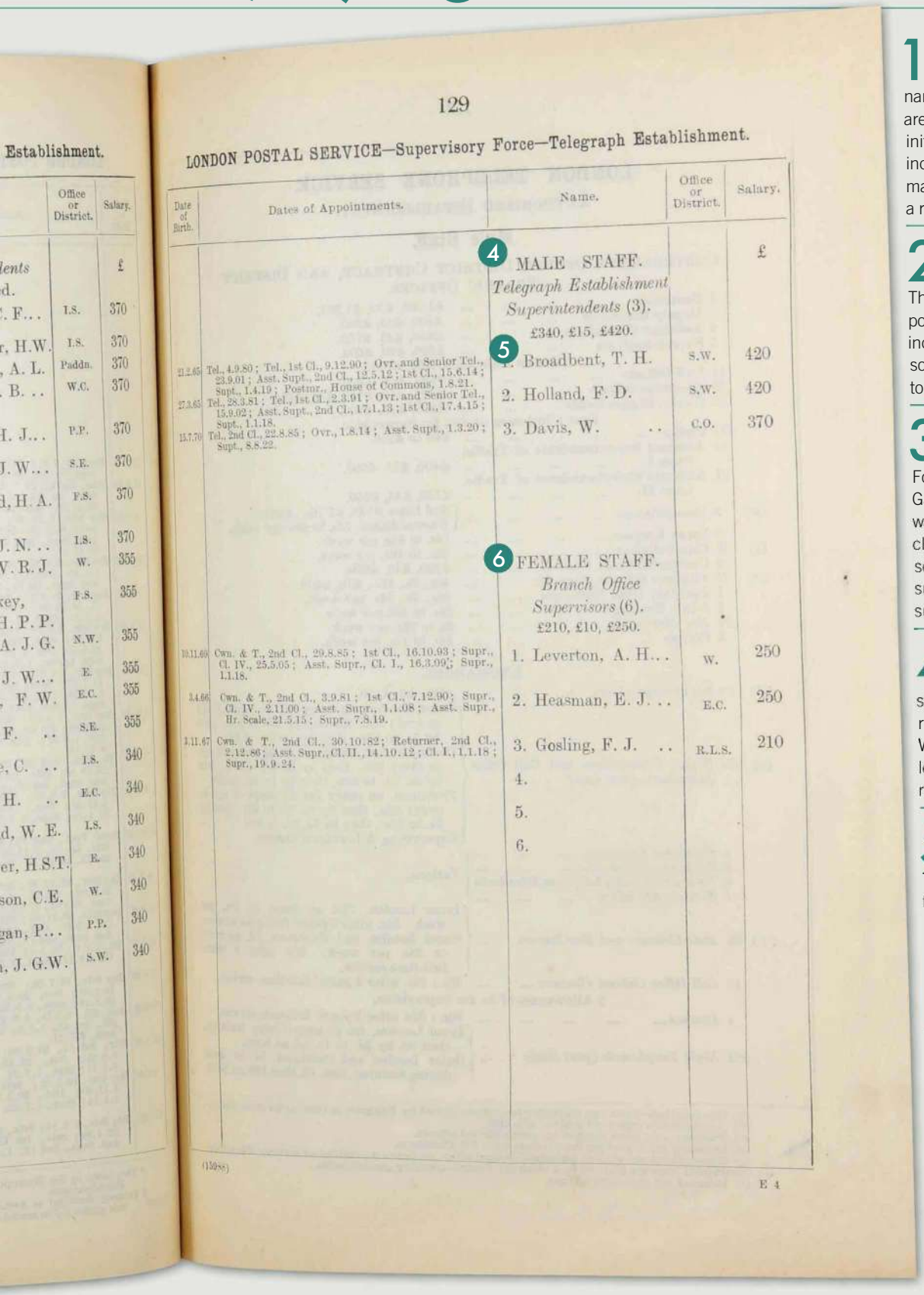
LONDON POSTAL SERVICE—Supervisory Force—Postal

Date of Birth. (1)	Dates of Appointments. (2)	Name.
		Superinten —continue
13.10.65	Boy Srtr., 26.9.81; Srtr., 2nd Cl., 6.7.85; 1st Cl., 6.11.90; Ovr., 16.6.03; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 14.8.16; Supt., 18.1.22.	20. Baxter,
1.9.68	Srtr., 3rd Cl., 23.1.88; 2nd Cl., 16.3.90; Ovr., 31.8.05; Asst. Supt., 8.9.19; Supt., 15.2.22.	21. Batchelo
20.12.69	Srtr., 3rd Cl., 28.5.88; 2nd Cl., 28.7.90; Ovr., 14.6.07; Asst. Supt., 16.4.20; Supt., 18.2.22.	22. McGrath
16.3.66	Boy Srtr., 20.3.82; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 1.2.86; 2nd Cl., 20.3.86; 1st Cl., 21.8.92; Ovr., 2nd Cl., 16.2.96; Ovr., 24.11.04; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 25.3.18; Supt., 11.6.22.	23. Plant, T
29.1.68	Boy Srtr., 29.12.84; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 22.11.86; 2nd Cl., 3.11.88; 1st Cl., 17.2.95; Ovr., 28.12.04; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 8.4.18; Supt., 2.6.22.	24. White,
11.6.66	Boy Srtr., 12.2.83; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 17.8.85; 2nd Cl., 11.7.86; 1st Cl., 12.2.93; Ovr., 17.7.02; Asst. Supt., 5.10.15; Supt., 1.6.22.	25. Turner,
21.10.77	S.C., 2nd Cl., B'ham, 18.1.96; C.C. & T., L.P.S., 5.7.97; Ppr. Kpr., 2nd Cl., Secys. Regy., 1.12.99; Clk., 3rd Cl., L.P.S., 20.9.03; 2nd Cl., 8.8.19; Supt., 8.8.22.	26. Crawfor
20.8.79	Srtr., 20.8.00; Clk., 3rd Cl., 24.9.03; 2nd Cl., 14.8.19; Supt., 8.8.22.	27. Crowe,
10.5.65	Srtr., 3rd Cl., 12.10.85; 2nd Cl., 29.5.87; 1st Cl., 30.7.93; Ovr., 23.11.03; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 29.12.16; Supt., 3.5.23.	28. Arden,
29.6.64	Boy Srtr., 14.2.81; Srtr., 2nd Cl., 10.1.83; Cmn., 2nd Cl., 30.1.87; Srtr., 2nd Cl., 9.5.87; 1st Cl., 29.3.91; Ovr., 1.2.08; Asst. Supt., 25.5.20; Supt., 1.7.23.	29. Grabas
19.5.68	Boy Srtr., 11.5.85; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 18.10.86; 2nd Cl., 1.5.88; 1st Cl., 12.8.94; Ovr., 5.7.05; Asst. Supt., 5.8.19; Supt., 2.8.23.	30. Hale,
3.6.72	Pmn., 16.1.93; Senr. Pmn. and Lobby Offr., 16.7.01; Ovr., 14.6.07; Asst. Supt., 27.4.20; Supt., 16.8.23.	31. Blyth,
16.2.66	Boy Srtr., 15.8.81; Srtr., 2nd Cl., 7.4.84; 1st Cl., 25.6.93; Ovr., 23.4.11; Asst. Supt., 14.12.20; Supt., 29.10.23.	32. Spence
24.6.67	Boy Srtr., 18.2.84; Subn. Pmn., 2nd Cl., 4.5.85; Srtr. 2nd Cl., 8.8.87; 1st Cl., 14.1.94; Ovr., 23.11.03; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 29.5.17; Supt. 6.12.23.	33. Moore,
14.4.68	Srtr., 3rd Cl., 14.2.87; 2nd Cl., 27.3.89; 1st Cl., 27.1.97; Ovr., 14.3.05; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 1.12.18; Supt., 7.12.23.	34. Morric
4.6.68	Boy Srtr., 2.2.85; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 31.1.87; 2nd Cl., 27.3.89; 1st Cl., 19.7.91; Ovr., 24.10.04; Asst. Supt., 1.9.19; Supt. 18.12.23.	35. Head,
21.11.69	Boy Srtr., 29.12.83; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 14.5.88; 2nd Cl., 28.7.90; 1st Cl., 1.4.97; Ovr., 10.4.07; Asst. Supt., 15.3.21; Supt., 7.1.24.	36. Hollar
18.3.68	Boy Srtr., 4.8.84; Srtr. 3rd Cl., 18.7.87; 2nd Cl., 1.3.90; 1st Cl., 31.5.96; Ovr., 5.7.05; Asst. Supt., 1.12.19; Supt. 18.2.24.	37. Throw
29.8.68	Boy Srtr., 9.3.85; Tn. Pmn. 2nd Cl., 1.4.88; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 27.7.88; 2nd Cl., 28.7.90; Srtr., 1.4.97; Ovr., 26.8.08; Asst. Supt., 6.1.21; Supt., 25.3.24.	38. Robin
7.8.69	Pcl. Pmn., 11.10.86; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 27.7.88; 2nd Cl., 28.7.90; Srtr., 1.4.97; Ovr., 5.3.09; Asst. Supt., 1.4.21; Supt., 31.3.24.	39. [illegible]lana
17.5.70	Boy Srtr., 12.1.85; Srtr., 3rd Cl., 18.6.88; 2nd Cl., 28.7.90; Srtr., 1.4.97; Ovr., 26.10.07; Asst. Supt., 28.6.20; Supt., 14.7.24.	40. Gahar

ROYAL MAIL GROUP, COURTESY OF THE POSTAL MUSEUM

Book, 1925

This establishment book is held by The Royal Mail Archive at The Postal Museum in London (POST 59/157), and available digitally on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62454**)



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LONDON POSTAL SERVICE—Supervisory Force—Telegraph Establishment.

Date of Birth.	Dates of Appointments.	Name.	Office or District.	Salary.
		4 MALE STAFF. *Telegraph Establishment Superintendents* (3). £340, £15, £420.		£
21.2.65	Tel., 4.9.80; Tel., 1st Cl., 9.12.90; Ovr. and Senior Tel., 23.9.01; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 12.5.12; 1st Cl., 15.6.14; Supt., 1.4.19; Postmr., House of Commons, 1.8.21.	5 1. Broadbent, T. H.	S.W.	420
27.3.65	Tel., 28.3.81; Tel., 1st Cl., 2.3.91; Ovr. and Senior Tel., 15.9.02; Asst. Supt., 2nd Cl., 17.1.13; 1st Cl., 17.4.15; Supt., 1.1.18.	2. Holland, F. D.	S.W.	420
15.7.70	Tel., 2nd Cl., 22.8.85; Ovr., 1.8.14; Asst. Supt., 1.3.20; Supt., 8.8.22.	3. Davis, W. ..	C.O.	370
		6 FEMALE STAFF. *Branch Office Supervisors* (6). £210, £10, £250.		
10.11.66	Cwn. & T., 2nd Cl., 29.8.85; 1st Cl., 16.10.93; Supr., Cl. IV., 25.5.05; Asst. Supr., Cl. I., 16.3.09; Supr., 1.1.18.	1. Leverton, A. H...	W.	250
3.4.66	Cwn. & T., 2nd Cl., 3.9.81; 1st Cl., 7.12.90; Supr., Cl. IV., 2.11.00; Asst. Supr., 1.1.08; Asst. Supr., Hr. Scale, 21.5.15; Supr., 7.8.19.	2. Heasman, E. J. ..	E.C.	250
1.11.67	Cwn. & T., 2nd Cl., 30.10.82; Returner, 2nd Cl., 2.12.86; Asst. Supr., Cl. II., 14.10.12; Cl. I., 1.1.18; Supr., 19.9.24.	3. Gosling, F. J. ..	R.L.S.	210
		4.		
		5.		
		6.		

(13088) E 4

1 Date Of Birth
Although the full names of members of staff are not given, only their initials and surnames, the inclusion of a birthdate makes it easier to identify a relation in the records.

2 Dates Of Appointments
This column gives a potted history of a career, including the dates that someone was appointed to each new job.

3 Gahan, J. G. W.
For example, JGW Gahan's career trajectory was boy sorter, sorter 3rd class, (sorter) 2nd class, sorter, overseer, assistant superintendent and superintendent.

4 Male Staff
Male and female staff were usually recorded separately. Women were often paid less money for the same role (not shown here).

5 Broadbent, T. H.
TH Broadbent rose up through the ranks to become postmaster at the House of Commons. He retired in 1926 after 46 years' service in the Post Office.

6 Female Staff
Like the men, AH Leverton, EJ Heasman and FJ Gosling started work aged 15 or 16, likely also staying with the Post Office until their retirement.

A Post Officer worker collects letters from a London postbox in 1941

the medical department, surveyors (the equivalent of today's regional managers) and postmasters.

Between 1857 and 1985 the Post Office published printed establishment books, called 'List of Officers of the General Post Office' and later 'Lists of the Principal Officers in the Post Office'. We still refer to them all under the general (and simpler!) title of establishment books. The early printed books give details of senior staff and clerks for a variety of departments, and include name, date of appointment to each job held, and salary. By 1916 the date of birth was added. Helpfully, these books include an index of staff names in the back, although you won't need this if you are searching them online.

In 1969 the Post Office became a nationalised industry. From this point onwards, the establishment books stop showing details of pay but continue to list senior staff by department, with their dates of birth and their various appointments.

Indirect Information

The books also reveal other information indirectly. Each person's promotion may indicate hours spent studying and passing exams to rise up to the next level. Each step up the ladder usually meant a higher rate of pay as well. The women who are recorded in the annotated document from 1925, who were all nearing age 60 and retirement, would not have been married, because the 'marriage bar' that applied to all female civil servants from 1876 until the mid-20th century forced established women to leave the organisation when they married.

Some establishment books take a different format. They are handwritten, and may cover a particular office, sometimes over decades, for example Ayrshire, Carmarthen, Manchester and Falmouth. Some cover subjects like staffing, appointments, vacancies and misconduct cases.

If you can't find your Post Office ancestor in the establishment books, you can try the appointment books or pension and gratuity records, which are also on Ancestry in the collections 'UK, Postal Service Appointment Books, 1737–1969' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1933/**) and 'UK, Royal Mail Pension and Gratuity Records, 1860–1970' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62452/**).

TOP TIP!
The museum's free research guide for family historians includes explanations of many of the terms and abbreviations in the books. Download it from **tinyurl.com/post-off-mus-guide**.

SUSANNAH COSTER is an archivist at The Postal Museum, where she also advises family historians

Resources
Take your research further

BOOKS

Post Office Workers: A Trade Union and Social History
Alan Clinton
George Allen & Unwin, 1984
This comprehensive look at how postal workers came together to campaign for better pay, working conditions and quality of life can be borrowed for free from the Internet Archive at **tinyurl.com/arch-pow-clint**.

Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840
Martin J Daunton
Athlone Press, 1985
Daunton's book includes a detailed chapter that explains the differences between established and unestablished staff.

MUSEUM

THE POSTAL MUSEUM
a **15–20 Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DA**
t 0300 030 0700
e *bookings@postalmuseum.org*
w **postalmuseum.org**
The museum's website has expert advice about searching for ancestors who worked for the Post Office: **postalmuseum.org/collections/the-archive/family-history/**. The archive also offers a paid family history research service, and staff are happy to answer questions about family history and the Post Office sent to *archives@postalmuseum.org*.

GETTY IMAGES

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Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Anthony Adolph is a professional genealogist and the author of 11 books

Dave Annal is a genealogist, author and lecturer

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

Roger Kershaw is migration records specialist at The National Archives

Nicola Morris is a genealogist based in Dublin (**timeline.ie**)

Steve Thomas is a genealogist with over 20 years' experience

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author

Alison Toplis is a dress and textile historian

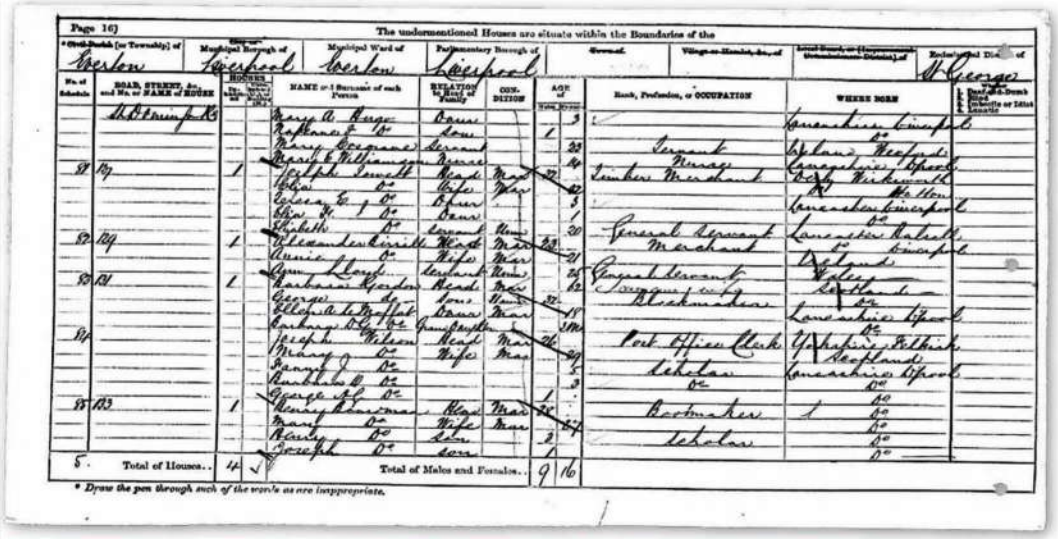
How do I find the baptism record of my Irish great grandmother?

Q Mary Ann Bell Cosgrave, my great grandmother, was born in Wexford, Ireland, c1853. She married John Picthall in 1873 at St Alexander's, Bootle, Liverpool, naming her father as Thomas Cosgrave, shoemaker. Her sister, Catherine, married in 1879 at St Mary's Church, Bootle, and provided the same details for her father.

Both appear in Liverpool in the 1871 census. Mary is 23 and Catherine 28 (however, I don't think this can be right). After the girls married, they can both be found in census returns in the Liverpool area.

I'm trying to find the sisters' birth records. There is a Confirmation record for a Mary Cosgrave in Piercetown, Wexford, in 1859, but nothing for Catherine, who I think was born c1850.

Lesley Wilson



Mary Cosgrave was working as a servant in Everton, Liverpool, when the 1871 census was taken on 2 April

A Have you checked the church marriage register for St Alexander's in Bootle for Mary Ann's mother's name? Roman Catholic marriage registers sometimes include this additional information.

Griffith's Valuation, enumerated for the county of Wexford in the early 1850s, lists the ratepayer or head occupier of nearly every household in Ireland and should include Thomas Cosgrave, thus establishing his address. Griffith's is freely available online at government website Ask About Ireland (**askaboutireland.ie**).

If Mary Ann was born c1853, the only evidence of her birth will be a baptismal record, provided the baptismal registers survive for the parish in which she was born. At John Grenham's site Irish Ancestors (**johngrenham.com**) you will find maps of the Wexford Roman Catholic parishes, and the details of what survives for each parish. The baptismal registers for all surviving Wexford parishes are available at Catholic Parish Registers at the NLI (**registers.nli.ie**), where you can manually check for the Cosgrave family – online databases are not always reliable. Keep your search broad, and check at least two years either side of her given year of birth. I would not rule out any results if you cannot find her sister, Catherine, because earlier baptisms may not survive.

It would be worth searching civil death registers for the death of Thomas Cosgrave, shoemaker, born prior to 1835 or 1840. These are available at Irish Genealogy (**irishgenealogy.ie**), where you can view the original registration for free (the records of some early deaths, prior to 1872, cost €5). Similarly, you could check the same source for Cosgrave marriages in Wexford, and surrounding counties, for a bride or groom with a father Thomas, shoemaker. This may identify siblings of Mary Ann. Women married in their home parish, so if any sisters of Mary Ann can be found, their marriage registration will reveal their home parish.

Nicola Morris

HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL? Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.

Have I uncovered my forebear's christening?

Q I've hit a brick wall in relation to the parents of my 5x great grandfather, James Davis. His grave inscription says that he was "of Beckhouse" and died on 10 December 1861 aged 75.

The 1841 and 1851 census records show him living at Beckhouse, his birthplace as Carlisle, Cumberland, and an estimated birth year of 1786. The only possible record of his birth I can find is a christening in Cockermouth, Cumberland, in October 1789, with Hannah Davis listed as his mother.

How can I check whether this is the correct record?
Steven Davis

A It's cases like this that serve to remind us that you can't do everything online. Before the 19th century, Carlisle was divided into two ancient parishes: St Mary's and St Cuthbert's. While there is some coverage of baptisms from St Mary's on the major commercial genealogical websites – Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) both have records for St Mary's taken from FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) – there doesn't appear to be anything online for St Cuthbert's. Records from the ancient county of Cumberland (and other parts of what is now Cumbria) are fairly thin on the ground as far as online access is concerned, so you shouldn't be surprised that you've failed to uncover a record of James' birth/baptism.

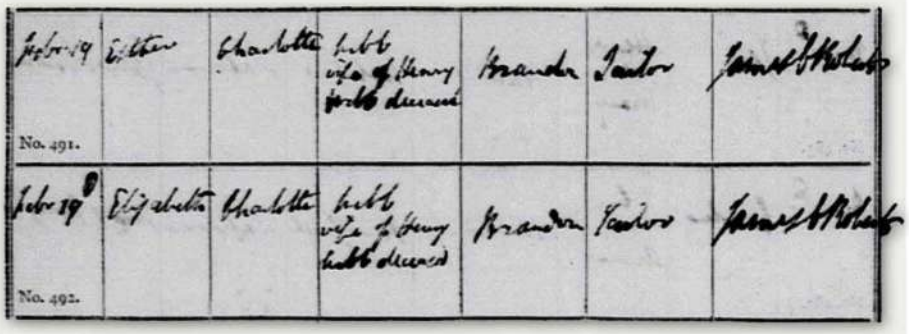
It's important that you're aware of this before you reach the conclusion that another baptism of someone with the same or similar name might be the person you're looking for. The child who was baptised at Cockermouth in 1789 is almost certainly not the James Davis who married Rachel Lewcock at nearby Irthington in 1820 – apart from anything else, Cockermouth is more than 25 miles from Carlisle.

The memorial inscription for Steven's 5x great grandfather James Davis

The St Cuthbert's parish registers are held by Cumbria Archives at the Carlisle Archive Centre (**cumbriaarchives.org.uk/carlisle-archive-centre**), and I would recommend that you begin your quest for James' origins here. The register there that covers baptisms from 1770–1794 will hopefully solve your mystery.
Dave Annal

Which Webb sister really married George Swann?

Q My 3x great grandfather, George Swann, married Elizabeth Webb in March 1851 at St Michael's Church, Coventry. Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry Webb, a tailor, and was baptised on 19 February 1832 at Wolston, Warwickshire, with her sister, Esther. There's a burial record for an Elizabeth Webb at Wolston in 1833. I can find no further records of Esther, but Elizabeth is on the 1841 census as a servant in Leamington Spa. Could Esther and Elizabeth have been twins, and their names swapped in error? Their father was buried shortly before their birth/baptism, while their mother, Charlotte, died in 1838.
Jo Roberts



Sisters Elizabeth and Esther Webb were both baptised on 19 February 1832

A Let's begin by reviewing what is known. Since Elizabeth and Esther were baptised less than two years after their parents' marriage, they may have been twins. Sometimes, when siblings were baptised together, the register is annotated "twins" or with dates of birth, but there is no such annotation here. Since the Wolston burial register says that Elizabeth was aged one year eight months in October 1833, there is little doubt that this was the baby baptised 20 months previously. The surviving child appears to have been orphaned in 1838. If so, then her mother's recorded age (17) is incorrect, because Charlotte must have been in her 20s.

If the girls' names were swapped, how could this have occurred? Two possibilities come to mind: first, that the wrong name was recorded against the 1833 burial. Where relatives are buried in the same plot, a headstone may confirm names and relationships. Wolston memorial inscriptions are on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) but, unfortunately, there are no entries for Webb. Death notices in local newspapers may also help but, again, I couldn't find one for this family.

Second, perhaps when orphaned, the surviving child entered the workhouse and the wrong name was given upon her admission. Maybe the informant was the same person who supplied an incorrect age on Charlotte's death. Wolston was part of Rugby Poor Law Union, so its records should be at Warwickshire Archives (**heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk**). These may provide the answer.
Katherine Cobb

Picture Analysis

When was this family portrait taken?

Q Can you tell me when this photo was taken? I believe it may be of my great great grandfather, William Andrew Stone (born 1855); great great grandmother, Eliza Gray (born 1860); and two of their five daughters: Gertrude Ellen (1880–1900); Edith Kate (born 1881); Annie Harriett (born 1886); Eva Elizabeth (born 1888); and Florence Maud (born 1899).
Mike Perkins

A This portrait was taken by the photographer MB Olley, based in London and noted in a contemporary trade directory (1905–1906). With the floral buttonhole worn by the man, it seems to mark an important occasion.

The photograph dates from c1906–1908, which will hopefully help you identify the sitters. It shows off many of the typical features of Edwardian fashion, particularly the large hats and complex rolled and built-up women's hairstyles, often constructed using pads or over a frame. The group is dressed up, the man wearing the characteristic narrow trousers and knotted tie of the time. His wing-collared shirt and moustache were more conservative, younger men often being clean-shaven with turned-down collars, but he still presents a dapper air with his contrasting braid-edged striped waistcoat and carefully coiffed hair.

The child on the right is dressed appropriately for an older girl, hemlines shorter than women's but longer than young girls'. Her dress is an elaborate version of the smock style fashionable for children since the 1890s. Drawing on both adult and children's wear, she has the dark woollen stockings of childhood but a fashionable woman's hat – although her hair is still loose.
Alison Toplis

1 HAT
A broad-brimmed hat sporting a large, decorated crown – often seen embellished with feathers, ribbons and artificial flowers – helps to date this photograph to the second half of the first decade of the 20th century.

2 SLEEVE DETAILS
Fashionable lace-trimmed flounces around the elbow on both of the younger women's dresses show the refocusing of attention onto this area during the period.

3 WOMEN'S HAIRSTYLES
Hair was rolled up over pads to give this characteristic shape, often seen beneath the broad-brimmed hats of the time.

4 BLOUSE
The high-necked blouse was fashionable throughout the decade for women, often – as here – finished with a brooch. Its loose draped front, extending over the top of the skirt, is typical of the middle of the decade before a simpler fashionable line emerged by 1909.

How do I find out about Adolphus Pixton's career in the Royal Navy?

Q I've recently discovered that one of my ancestors was a Royal Navy seaman. His name was Adolphus Pixton, and his service number was 10888a. He was born in Ardwick, Manchester, on 21 July 1843. How do I research his maritime career?
Jacqueline Moore

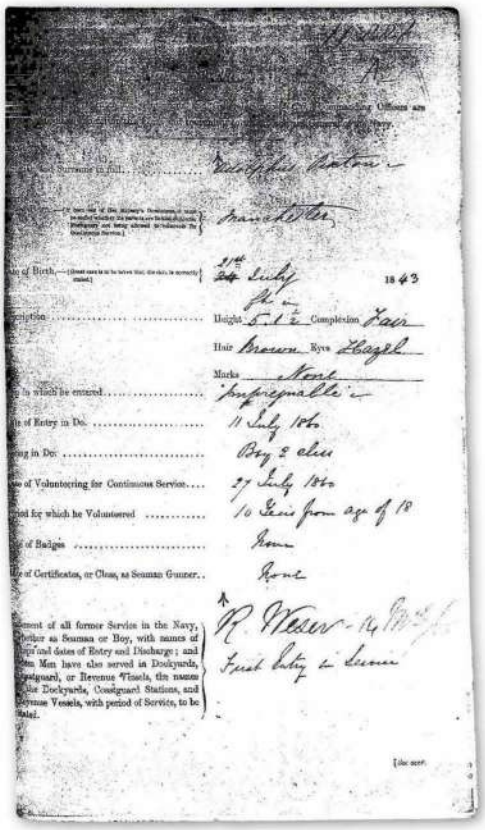
A The National Archives at Kew (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**) holds service records for Royal Navy seamen, and I've managed to find Adolphus Pixton's by searching its online catalogue Discovery. The record (reference ADM 139/509/10888) can be downloaded for free from **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7899441**.

It describes Adolphus as 5 feet 1½ inches tall and of fair complexion, with brown hair and hazel eyes. He was only 16 when he enlisted in July 1860 as a Boy 2nd Class, which was essentially the rank of rating for boys aged 16–18, and Adolphus volunteered for 10 years from the age of 18.

He started his career on board HMS *Impregnable*, which was a shore-based training ship for boys in Devonport.

I also found him in the 1861 census serving on the HMS *St Jean d'Acre*. This 99-gun ship served in the English Channel and the Mediterranean, and on the night of the census, 7 April 1861, was based at Cádiz Bay, off the coast of south-west Spain. Forty-two of its guns were changed at Gibraltar in July 1861 for others of modern construction. By this time, Adolphus had been promoted to Boy 1st Class, meaning he had demonstrated sufficient proficiency in seamanship and had accumulated at least one good-conduct badge, reflecting his increased skills.

By the time of the next census on 2 April 1871, Adolphus, 27, had left the Navy and was living in Ardwick with his wife, Elizabeth, and four-year-old daughter, Sarah. He worked as an iron turner, specifically a machinist who used a lathe to shape and finish metal items – primarily iron, but also brass and bronze.
Roger Kershaw


Our expert Roger has managed to download a copy of Adolphus Pixton's Royal Navy service record

TOP TIP The 1861 census was the first one to enumerate those at sea, including those serving in the Royal Navy. If you can't find your naval ancestor in the 1861 census but you know the ship he served on, you can browse by ship to see if he is there.

Is this Carlyon pedigree from Australia reliable?

Q I've acquired a family tree of a possible branch of my maternal Carlyon family living in Australia. My cousins and I did not know it existed, and my mother never mentioned them. It is entitled 'Pedigree of Carlyon Chart from College of Heraldry 1901'.

How much can I rely on this information? We knew that one of our ancestors left Cornwall when the tin mines failed, and went to Nevada prospecting for gold. He returned and on the 1891 census for Helston, Cornwall, is "living on his own means".
Rosemary Atkins

Miners chip away rock in a tin mine in St Just, Cornwall, 1877

A The College of Arms is part of the Royal Household and regulates heraldry in England and Wales. It is sometimes mis-termed the 'College of Heraldry'. The term 'College of Heraldry' has also been used by various other organisations, hoping thus to sound 'official', so beware.

Pedigrees emanating from the College of Arms are generally held to be accurate, especially when they draw on the college's substantial collection of original pedigree material, which dates from the Middle Ages. However, individual heralds' genealogical work was as prone to human error as anyone's.

Is it the claim of the 'College of Heraldry' pedigree that this Australian family is genuinely related to you? In all events, it is sensible to treat any pedigree material with scepticism and check it where possible against original records, which are generally much more accessible now than in 1901. To check if other Carylons from your line emigrated to Australia as miners and settled there, search the indexed passenger lists of ships to Australia, which are available on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and elsewhere. If you find members of your family then you can pursue them using the original records of Australia.
Anthony Adolph

Big Question

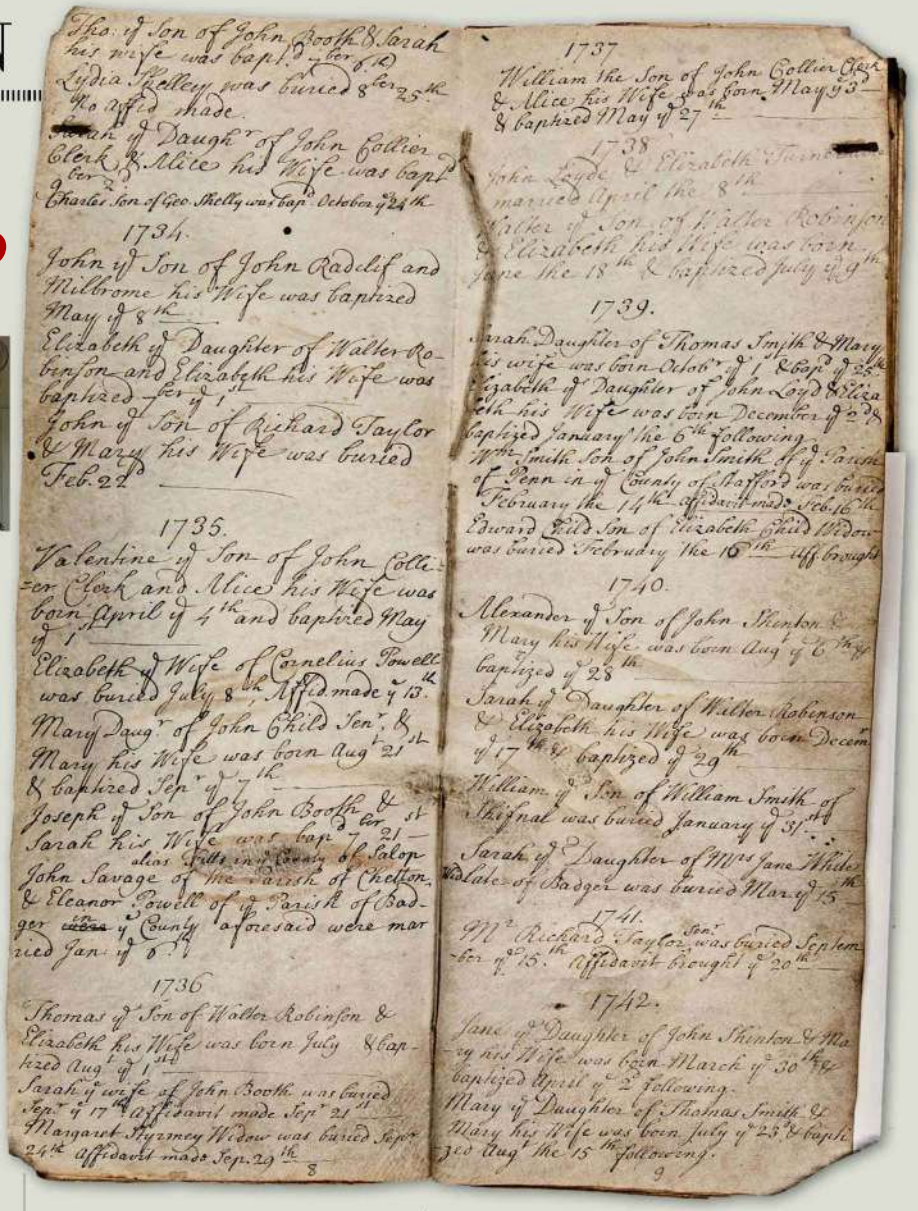
Who was Charles Shelley's mother?

Q My 7x great grandfather, Charles Shelley, was born on 24 October 1733 in Badger, Shropshire, to George Shelley (also listed as "Georgius"). However, his birth record does not name his mother, unlike the other entries in the register at that time. George married Ann Wright in 1731, but why was her name not included? Was Charles the result of an affair, or is there some other explanation for the form this entry takes?

Charles married Alice Matthews in 1757 at St Chad's Church, in nearby Pattingham, outside his home parish.

Jake Sanders

JAKE SANDERS is keen to uncover the identity of his 8x great grandmother



Charles Shelley's baptism on 24 October 1733 is recorded towards the top of the left-hand page, just below Lydia Shelley's burial

A The vicar and his aide, the churchwarden, were responsible for keeping the registers. The primary responsibility lay with the minister, but entries might be transcribed from a day book or scrap of paper into the register by either. The amount of detail in the entry was a matter of choice ranging from sophisticated Dade registers, which record details of the parents and grandparents, to simply noting the father's name as is the case here. Note that the baptismal entry for Charles in the Badger parish register is in a smaller hand, and was probably entered later. Dated 24 October 1733, it looks like a scaled-back version of the regular scribe.

Two entries above Charles' baptism, dated 25 October, is a burial record for a Lydia Shelley. The dates suggest that Lydia died in childbirth, and that Charles was her son. Note the shorthand for October "8ber", which can be confusing since it is the 10th month and its name is a vestige of the ancient Roman calendar, which began in March not January.

This entry is out of order, and should have been entered the day before Lydia's burial on 25 October. Instead, it was squeezed in at the end of the entries some time later, and was the last entry for the year after a baptism dated "9ber 2d" – that is, 2 November.

Maternal mortality rates were about 1.7 per cent in the mid-1700s, compared with roughly 0.013 per cent today. Between 1666 and 1813 the deceased was supposed to be buried in a woollen shroud to support the English wool producers and protect them from competition from cheap foreign linen imports. The relatives had eight days to furnish a supporting affidavit that the deceased was buried in a woollen shroud, or face a £5 fine. However, since wool was expensive many people could afford neither the shroud nor the fine, and the law became pretty unenforceable.

Looking through marriage indexes at Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), we find that George ("Georgius") Shelley of Hixon married Lydia Hitchinson of Heywood Parva (Little Heywood) on 13 May 1724 in Colwich, Staffordshire.

Strictly speaking this incumbent was obeying the law by choosing to keep his registers in Latin, the language of officialdom. In fact, most did not and an Act that took effect in 1733 declared that they no longer needed to do so in any case.

Colwich is about 25 miles from Badger, but you can trace the movement of the family south by looking for the baptism of older children. Margaret Shelley was baptised in Stowe, Staffordshire, in 1725, and George Shelley junior was baptised in Beckbury, Shropshire, in 1729. This last parish adjoins Badger.

It seems unlikely that the omission of Lydia's name from Charles' baptism entry was contrived to conceal the identity of the mother. It is more likely an oversight, or the emphasis on paternal lineage was deemed sufficient for the incumbent to fulfil his record-keeping obligation. The family appears to have been in the area for four years or so and her name was probably common knowledge in any case.

Steve Thomas

What can you tell me about Owen Lloyd Owen?

Q This is a photograph of my grandad, Owen Lloyd Owen (1913–1983), taken during the Second World War. I know nothing about his time in the Army, and wonder if you can tell me anything from his uniform.
Nia Llwyd

A This is a photograph of a young Royal Engineers driver/mechanic, pictured in his new uniform. It was taken in a studio, possibly on a visit home before joining his unit.

Owen appears in the 1939 Register as a lorry driver. He probably learnt to drive in the Army, and it became his trade in civilian life. As a qualified driver, it's possible he might have transferred to another army unit.

In case he went to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (many Engineers transferred), I checked their service records, which are, in theory, available on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**). Unfortunately, the site has still only released those for men who were born up to 1912.

I've also searched for Owen's Medal Index Card, but can't find one; possibly he received one but didn't return it. I'd hoped to find his soldier's number. Every individual had one in the Second World War, and it stayed with them throughout. His date of birth can be used to identify and order his service record. You'll need to send a Freedom of Information request to The National Archives; see the guide at **www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-records-of-service**. Note that you will have to prove his death, and there may be a charge.
Phil Tomaselli

1 CAP BADGE

The cap badge is that of the Royal Engineers in the reign of George VI. The initials "GR" are surrounded by a laurel wreath with "Honi soit qui mal y pense" arching above and "Royal Engineers" on a scroll below. The King's Crown is at the top.

2 GREATCOAT

The large-collared greatcoat (and cap) were favourites for recent recruits to wear for photographs they could send to their mothers!

3 SHOULDER BRASS

Owen wears a brass "RE" for Royal Engineers, probably indicating an early date in the war. Later, for reasons of cost, these were replaced by cloth patches.

4 MISSING UNIT BADGE

Your grandfather doesn't have a cloth unit or formation badge – the Royal Engineers unit badge was a strip of red and blue. The formation badge indicated which division he was attached to, but these were only introduced in late 1940.

5 TRADE BADGE

His trade in the Royal Engineers is indicated by the cloth badge on his arm, a wheel (or possibly a steering wheel): a driver/mechanic.

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GETTY IMAGES

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Torpedo Tragedy

Rosemary Collins explains how a family historian has researched a forgotten story from the First World War

Arnold Clarke and an artwork he created while held at Jørstadmœn

On 8 August 1915 HMS *India* was on patrol in the Arctic Circle near the Lofoten Islands in Norway, when the Royal Navy armed cruiser was struck by a torpedo fired by German U-boat U-22. The *India* sank in just five minutes; 123 men on board drowned, while 188 survived. Some managed to escape on two of its lifeboats, while others were rescued by HMS *Saxon*, a British trawler accompanying the ship, or by a passing Swedish steamer, SS *Gotaland*.

The rescue ships sailed to the town of Narvik in northern Norway. Although the country was neutral in the First World War, the Norwegian authorities warned Commander William Kennedy, the commanding officer of HMS *India*, that if the survivors stepped ashore from British ships, they would be treated as belligerent crew and detained. Since the men were freezing, many having been pulled from the water, and the *Saxon* and the lifeboats did not have adequate clothing, blankets, food or medical supplies on board, they were forced to disembark. The men who were rescued on the *Gotaland* were sent home to Britain, but the 108 men who were on the *Saxon* and the lifeboats were placed in an internment camp in the village of Jørstadmoen, where they spent the rest of the war.

The crew of the *India* had their freedom taken from them for over three years

Rebecca Clarke, from London, is married to the grandson of Richard Arnold Clarke (1893–1978), known as Arnold, who was among those rescued by the *Saxon* and interned in the camp. Her husband's family have inherited a collection of letters he wrote in captivity, as well as photographs and artwork he produced during his time there. Rebecca became more interested in the story of HMS *India* after her father-in-law came across another letter by Arnold that they didn't know about being sold in an online auction, and after she helped him look up one of the files about the ship preserved by The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**).

Since then, Rebecca has created the website HMS India – The Men Who Sailed Her and the Men Who Survived Her (**hmsindia.info**) which is dedicated to her research, including tracing more than 30 letters Arnold wrote while in internment that are now with collectors, and contacting over 35 descendants of its crew. She has also published a book about her findings, *A Bare Chronicle of Existence: Stories and Letters from Internment in Norway During WW1* (Austin Macauley Publishers, 2022).

Rebecca explains, "The men who fought in the trenches of the First World War experienced hell on earth. But the crew of the *India* were prepared to fight, they signed up, they went to war, they survived a horrific torpedo attack, and then they had their freedom taken from them for over three years. I think it's easy to dismiss them as having an easy war, and I wonder whether they felt that when they came back. I want to validate their experience."

Arnold's letters certainly show the depth of his ordeal. He sometimes says that he wishes he had died in the torpedo attack or could die in the camp, and is frequently lonely and depressed as he hears about the deaths of relations at home, including his brother who was killed in the war. However, he was able to keep motivated throughout his internment by focusing on producing his artwork, including sketches and paintings on birch-wood circles.

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*

Discover More

HMS India – The Men Who Sailed Her And The Men Who Survived Her
w **hmsindia.info**

Visit Rebecca's website to find out more about her research, including a list of the resources she accessed at TNA, and read the names of all of the victims and survivors of the sinking. You can also contact her via an online form.

THE BIG PICTURE

Celebrating our ancestors caught on camera

GETTY IMAGES

Halloween Apple Bobbing

Londoners in fancy dress, including two witches, bob for apples on 31 October 1922

Few words are as overused these days as 'iconic'. But close your eyes, and imagine a witch. Chances are you're picturing Margaret Hamilton playing the simultaneously terrifying (to children) but hugely entertaining (to adults) Wicked Witch of the West in the timeless Hollywood musical *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), based on L Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). The look is unforgettable, including green skin and a tall, pointed black hat. That striking imagery lives on in Gregory Maguire's prequel novel *Wicked* (1995) and the 2003 stage musical, which itself has been adapted for cinema – and the second and final film in the series *Wicked: For Good* opens on 21 November.

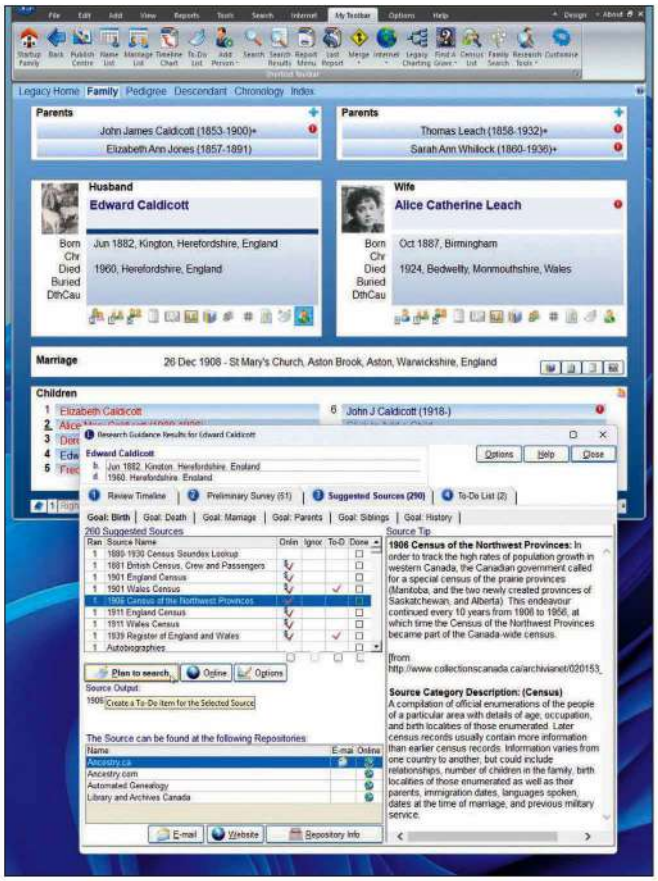
As our photo shows, witches were associated with tall black hats before the release of *The Wizard of Oz*. In fact the connection has thrived for hundreds of years, at least as far back as illustrations from the witch hunts and subsequent trials of the 16th to 18th centuries, in which upwards of 2,000 people may have been executed in England and Scotland alone – the overwhelming majority of them women.

Indeed in 1597 the king himself, James VI of Scotland and James I of England and Ireland, who had been involved in witch trials in North Berwick several years earlier, wrote the influential tract *Daemonologie* about the dangers of consorting with demons, and the value of witch hunts.

Eventually, reason prevailed. The 1735 Witchcraft Act made it a crime to claim that anyone could have magical powers or practise witchcraft, essentially ending the hunting and prosecution of witches in Great Britain.

But most of us will never know if any of our relations lost their lives because they were mentally ill, or disfigured, or disabled, or folk healers, or just different from the norm in a village hit by disease, bad weather, or a death or crop failure that couldn't be explained.

You can find out more about English witch trials at **witchtrials.co.uk/trials.html** and Scotland's at **witches.hca.ed.ac.uk/home/**.



Improve your research with a powerful free tool

Nick Peers reveals how Legacy 10's Research Guidance tool can break down brick walls

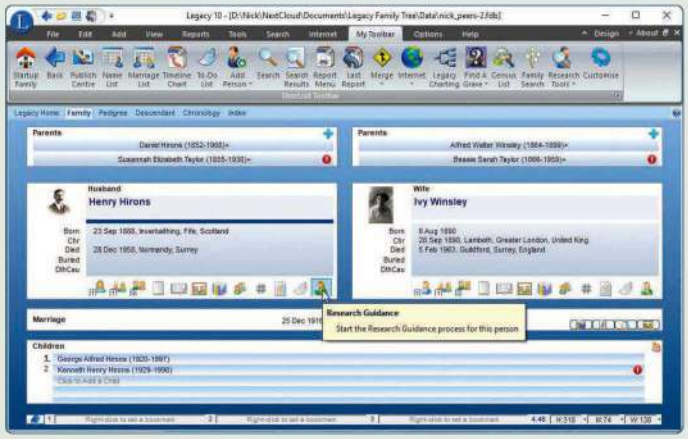
There's nothing more frustrating than finding yourself at a dead end when researching an ancestor. Often, it's not because you've exhausted all possibilities, but rather because you've not realised what other information is out there. All you need is a nudge in the right direction, and if you're a Windows PC user, Legacy's Research Guidance tool can provide you with that push.

The tool allows you to select a person and choose which of their facts to focus on before it offers up a selection of potential online avenues to search. They include possible sources (complete with links to the websites that house them) as well as more general areas of research, such as websites where others share their own discoveries or congregate on message boards to offer words of wisdom.

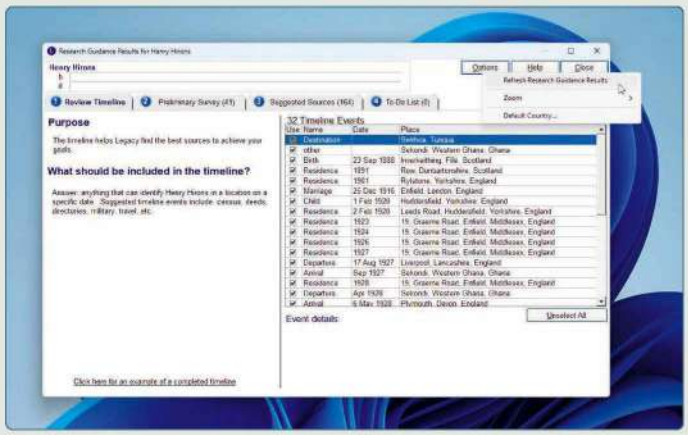
In the past, the Research Guidance tool was restricted to those who'd paid for a Legacy Deluxe licence, but now it's available to all users. You don't even need to be a regular Legacy user to benefit – simply head over to Legacy's website (**legacyfamilytree.com**) to download the program. After installation, import your tree as a GEDCOM file before following our tutorial to give your research a shot in the arm.

TOP TIP!

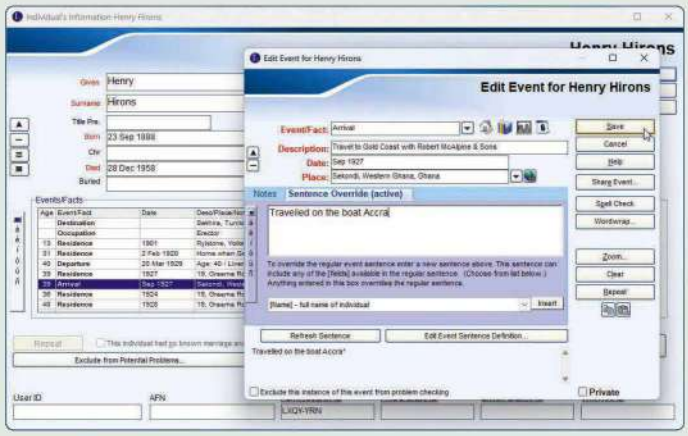
If you've already examined one of the sources listed under 'Suggested Sources', tick the 'Done' box to remind yourself you've previously checked it.



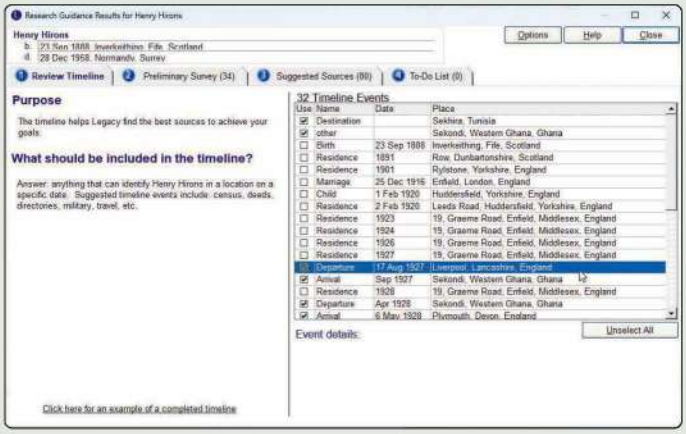
1 Select Your Relation Open your GEDCOM file and navigate to the person you wish to research. Once they're selected under the 'Family' tab, click the 'Research Guidance' button as shown in the screenshot above. You can also access the tool from the 'Tools > Other Tools' button on the ribbon.



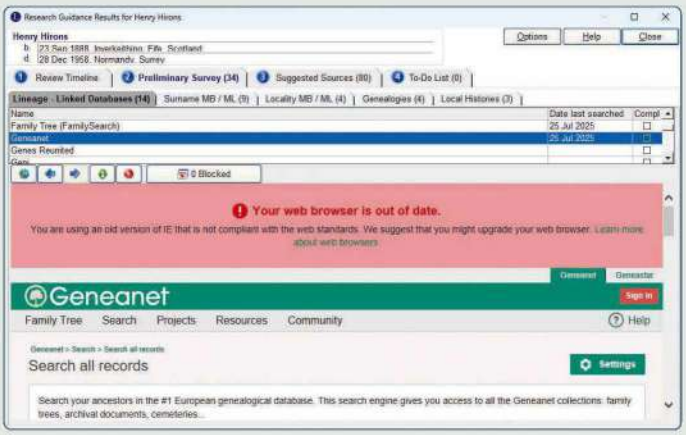
2 Check The Timeline The 'Research Guidance Results' window will open to the first of four tabs: 'Review Timeline'. If it doesn't automatically display a list of the selected relative's facts, click the 'Options' button in the top right and choose 'Refresh Research Guidance Results' to populate the list.



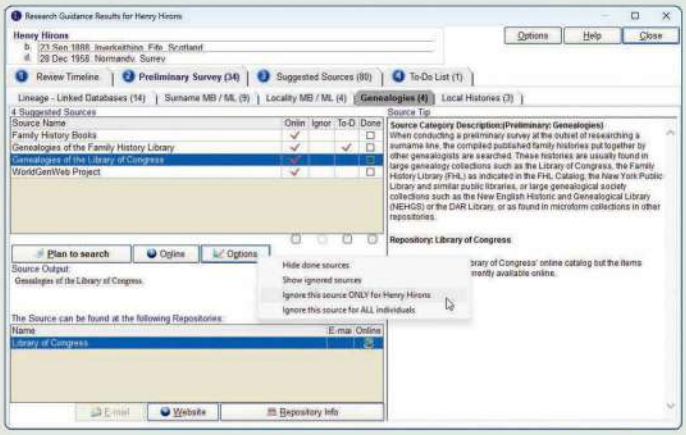
3 Add More Information If the timeline doesn't show the information you're expecting to see, you'll need to add it to your relation's record. Close the dialogue box, then double-click on the record to open their personal information window. Click 'Add' to add new events/facts, or 'Edit' to add detail to an existing one.



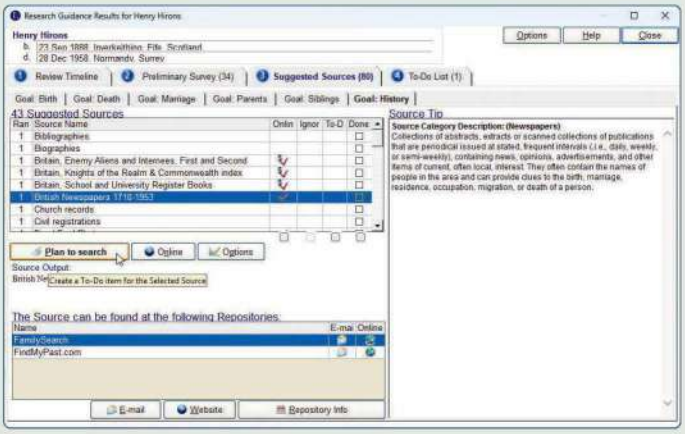
4 Choose Events To Include Once the timeline is populated, you'll see the 'Preliminary Survey' and 'Suggested Sources' tabs refresh to show numbers next to them. If you're looking for specific information, start unticking events that aren't relevant to your search – you'll see the numbers on both tabs start to fall as you do so.



5 Find New Places To Look Switch to the 'Preliminary Survey' tab to see five further tabs. The first three provide shortcuts to shared online trees and message boards, but will only open in the tool's browser, which is outdated and doesn't work properly. Either skip them or look for the corresponding site in your main browser.

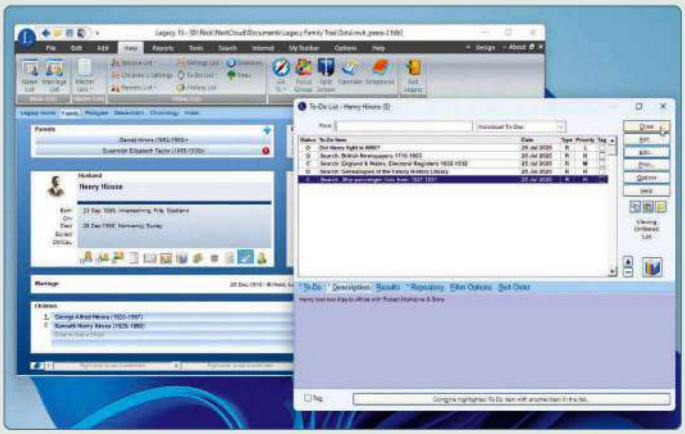


6 Search More Resources The final two tabs – 'Genealogies' and 'Local Histories' – provide convenient shortcuts to more online resources. Select a website to see a description in the right-hand column, while on the left you'll see buttons to visit the site in your browser or add it to your To-Do List.



7 Access Suggested Sources The most important option is the 'Suggested Sources' tab, which displays a list of record sets that might be relevant to selected events. They're split into various categories (birth, death, siblings, history etc). If you find any of interest, click the 'Plan to search' button to add them to your To-Do List.

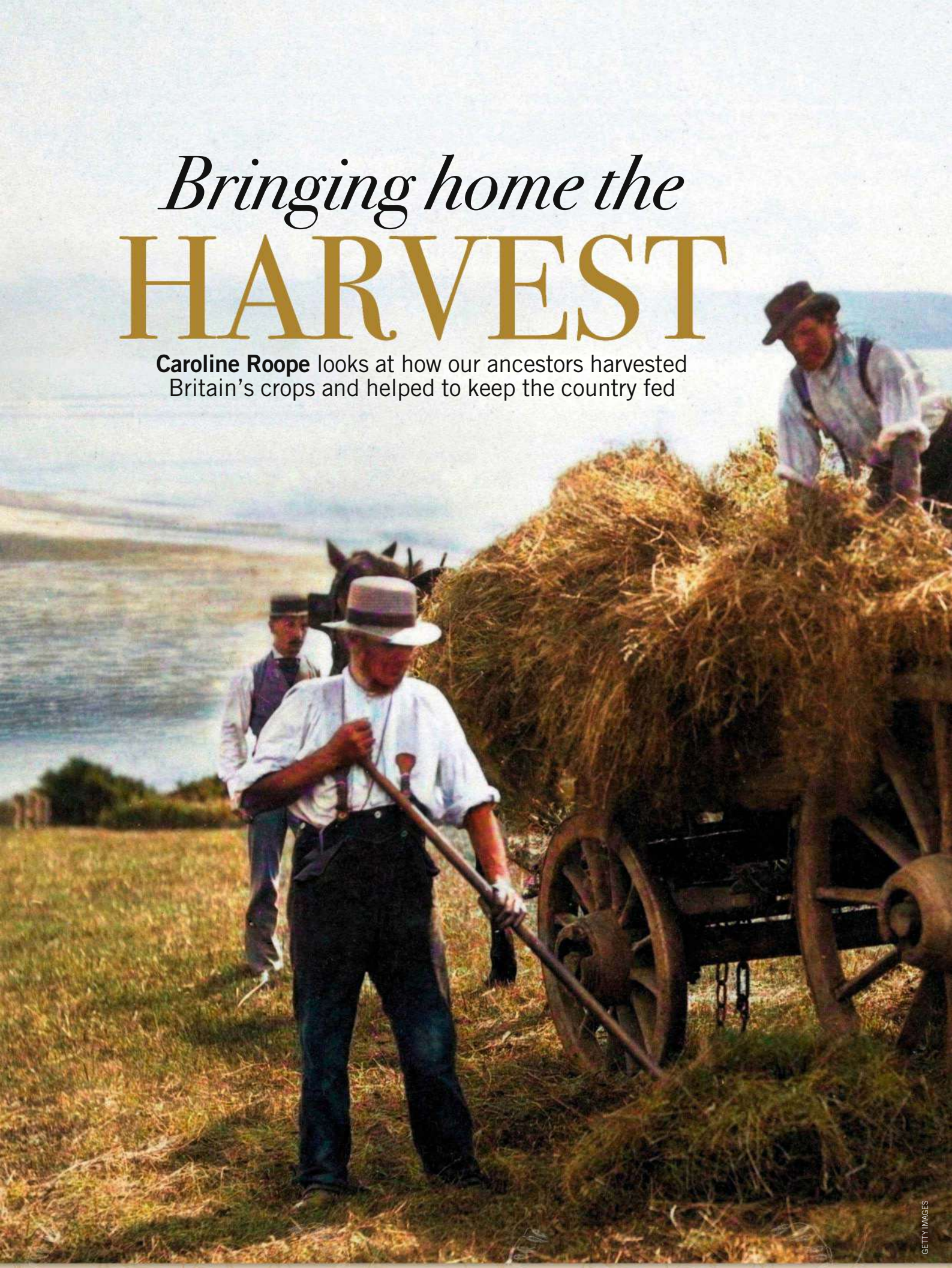
8 Review Your To-Do List Click the 'To-Do List' tab at any time to view a list of resources you've earmarked for further investigation. If the list is a little lacking in detail, select an entry and click 'Edit' to view (and edit) the To-Do Item in its own dialog, allowing you to add a description, record results and more.



9 Mark Off Items The 'Edit' screen is also where you mark a To-Do Item as complete (change its status to 'Closed'). When you've finished putting your To-Do List together, click 'Close' – the list can be accessed going forward by selecting the individual in question and clicking the To-Do List entry under the 'View' tab of the ribbon.

Bringing home the HARVEST

Caroline Roope looks at how our ancestors harvested Britain's crops and helped to keep the country fed



GETTY IMAGES

As the warm days of summer give way to the fresher feel of autumn, many of us will recall with nostalgia the harvest festivals of our youth. Such festivities – often including lavish displays of crops, and a chorus of the hymn *We Plough the Fields and Scatter* (1800) – both celebrate the changing seasons and express gratitude for the crops gathered by the farming community. Although advances in technology have undoubtedly changed how the harvest is brought in, harvest festivities were just as important to our forebears as they are today.

While there were many regional differences to how the harvest was celebrated, what did unite everyone was the importance of a good harvest and the reverence in which it was held. Traditionally, farmers began harvesting their crops towards the end of August and in early September, and it was very much a family affair. The lives of whole communities were dependent on the success of the harvest, so it was everyone's responsibility – including children – to ensure that every last potato, apple, ear of corn, or hop was collected. The grain harvest ▶

Agricultural labourers pitch hay into a cart on a farm near Whitby on the Yorkshire Coast, c1880

was frequently the busiest time of year, and fine weather was required for it to be completed successfully, making the forecast a hot topic of conversation in regional newspapers. Reflecting on the summer weather in 1894, the *Sporting Gazette* reported that all had gone well for the farming community until the end of July, at which point disaster had struck. "If only August would be true to the best of its traditions and bring with it the warm sunshine that was needed for the ripening and harvesting of the corn," the newspaper complained. But it was not to be. "The sun was in the sulks during a great part of the month, and the crops were delivered over to the tender mercies of wind and rain. In the North of England especially there was a disastrous downpour almost every day." This may explain the British obsession with the weather!

Enough Work For All

During the first half of the 19th century, most harvest work was done by hand. Women used sickles, while men wielded heavier scythes, reaping crops in staggered teams. Children and women followed, tying cut wheat into sheaves, which were then set upright in stacks (also known as stooks or shocks) to dry. Once ready, the sheaves were taken to the farmyard in wagons, where they were stacked again.

Regular farm workers, of which there were approximately one million employed in England and Wales in the mid-19th century, were joined by unskilled labourers during harvest time. The corn harvest, particularly, demanded as many hands as could be found, so villagers, Gypsies, and casual and itinerant workers joined the workforce. For families in industrial areas, an annual working holiday in the countryside provided a breath of fresh air and a chance for youngsters to learn about rural life. Itinerant workers could also take advantage of the fact that different regions harvested at different times. In Yorkshire there could be a month's difference between the early harvests in the Humber Valley and cutting the crops of the more northern districts, so casual workers moved from region to region, covering large distances as they did so. Irish harvesters were often well represented in the workforce in the 18th and 19th centuries and after sailing into Liverpool would work their way across the country, helping with the hay harvest in Lancashire and Cheshire, moving on to the hay and corn harvests of the Midlands then finding copious opportunities in the cereal-growing counties of eastern England.

A labourer wields a scythe, c1900
Left: a corn dolly from Staffordshire shaped like a knot

People celebrating a 'harvest home' encircle a corn dolly, c1815

Following the harvest, the community would come together for a harvest supper or 'harvest home', which was provided by the farmer. The back-breaking work and long hours – normally dawn until dusk in peak harvest season – meant that the meal was a much-anticipated conclusion to weeks of arduous work. A lavish spread of meats, vegetables, puddings and tarts was washed down with ale and cider, before singing, dancing and drinking games ensued. "The joyful season of Harvest has in most nations given rise to a number of ceremonies expressive of mirth and festivity… There is no distinction of persons, but masters and servants sit at the same table, converse freely together, and spend the remainder of the night in dancing, singing, &c. in the most familiar manner a conviviality of which every

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poor dependant and villager in the neighbourhood more or less partakes," the *Bristol Mercury* stated in September 1823.

The seasonal amusements were usually concluded by Michaelmas (the Feast of St Michael and All Angels) on 29 September, the date that signified the end of the harvest. The last sheaf of corn had particular significance. In Cornwall, the reapers would cut the final stalks with a scythe and hold it aloft, shouting "I have 'un! I have 'un! I have 'un!" The farm workers would respond, "What 'ave 'ee? What 'ave 'ee? What 'ave 'ee?" The reaper then replied, "A neck! A neck! A neck!" and everyone shouted "Hurrah! Hurrah for the neck!"

Dolly Display

The final handful of corn stalks were saved, woven into a 'corn dolly' and displayed at the harvest supper. The dolly represented the spirit of the corn, and was kept until the following spring to bring good fortune for the next harvest; in some regions the dolly was ploughed into the first furrow that was cut. The dolly had regional variations, and in Cambridgeshire took the form of a handbell. In Staffordshire, the dolly was worked into a knot, and in Herefordshire it was woven into a complex lantern shape.

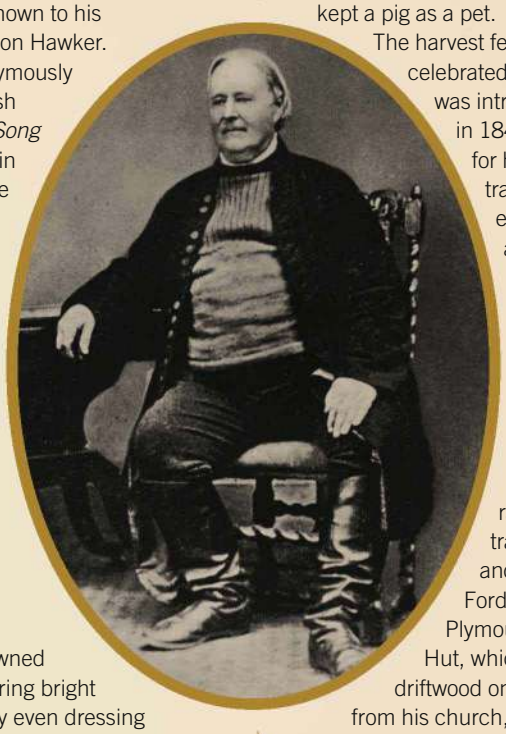
Rev. Robert Hawker 1803–1875

An eccentric priest had a major influence on Britain's harvest traditions

Robert Stephen Hawker was an Anglican priest, poet and antiquarian. Born in Plymouth, he was known to his parishioners as Parson Hawker. As a writer, he anonymously published the Cornish patriotic poem *The Song of the Western Men* in 1825, which became a popular song, and was acknowledged as its author by Charles Dickens. Ordained in 1831, Hawker became curate at North Tamerton, north-east Cornwall, before settling in 1834 as vicar of Morwenstow in the north of the county, where he remained throughout his life.

Hawker was renowned to be eccentric, wearing bright colours and allegedly even dressing up as a mermaid.

He also purportedly excommunicated his cats for mousing on Sundays (yet welcomed them into his church), talked to birds, and kept a pig as a pet.



The harvest festival that is celebrated in churches today was introduced by Hawker in 1843 to thank God for his bounty – a tradition that quickly established itself across the country.

Hawker died on 15 August 1875, having converted to Roman Catholicism on his deathbed. In a fitting tribute, mourners at his funeral wore purple rather than the traditional black, and he was buried at Ford Park cemetery in Plymouth. Today Hawker's Hut, which he built from driftwood on the cliffs a mile from his church, and where he wrote and smoked opium, is the smallest building in the National Trust's care.

The end-of-harvest entertainments, which almost always involved drinking to excess, were frequently the target of clerical criticism, so the Church sought to devise its own harvest celebration. The festival that is still observed today is said to have originated in Morwenstow, north Cornwall, in 1843, when Rev. Robert Hawker invited parishioners to receive the sacrament made of "the bread of the new corn", and sing hymns giving thanks for the seasonal bounty (see the box).

The end-of-harvest entertainments were frequently the target of clerical criticism

This provided a more respectable alternative to the secular frolics on the farm, and by the end of the 1860s many parishes had adopted a day of harvest thanksgiving that involved a special morning service followed by a celebratory tea. Churches would be decorated with flowers, foliage, fruit and other tokens of the harvest. "Harvest is over; and the young ladies of our villages are becoming absorbed in plans of church decoration for the harvest festival services," the *South Wales Daily News* reported in September 1899. "The old traditional harvest home merry-making is now almost defunct; the church festival has taken its place."

The same article relates how the pulpit of a rural clergyman in East Anglia was so enthusiastically decorated that "bowers of green stuff" and harvested goods threatened to overwhelm him ▶

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Children from the Leytonstone branch of the Homeless Children's Aid and Adoption Society tuck into fruit sent by churches from their harvest gifts, 1 October 1936

as he delivered his sermon. "He had to preach with a row of small flower glasses full of water round the top ledge of the pulpit, and with points of wire and ruchings of prickly things hemming him in to such an extent he was afraid of disaster every time he ventured to move his surplice."

Fruitful Decoration

The author Laurie Lee (1914–1997), when recalling the harvest festivals of his youth in the 1920s, described how the "cream of the valley" was used to decorate the village church in Slad, Gloucestershire. "To pass through its door, those festivals ago, was like crawling into a cornucopia, a laden granary, a grotto of bright flowers… Four great stocks of wheat stood up before the altar, together with round ornamental loaves as big as cartwheels. The altar itself was piled with golden apples… And thick on the floor, wherever there was space, lay scrubbed and shining vegetables."

Occasionally a combination of religious observance and secular festivities would occur. For example, in 1858 a day of "public thanksgiving" was held in the parish of Symondsbury, Dorset, in which a parade of farmers and their farm workers, "men who had borne the heat and burden of the work" and village ladies "neatly clad in light summer dresses" marched with decorated flags to the local church accompanied by a band. "The effect was exceedingly picturesque," according to an account published in the *Dorset County Chronicle*. "The entrance to the churchyard was spanned by an arch of evergreens, on which was inscribed in ears of corn, 'Praise God for the harvest'."

After the service, the villagers made their way to a nearby field where "rural sports", dancing and refreshments were enjoyed, as well as an old local custom in which the harvesters formed a circle, took off their hats and bowed, while chanting thanks to the land for its bounty.

From the farmers and labourers in the field, to the villagers who benefited from their hard work, harvest time wove together the lives of the community in a shared spirit of effort and gratitude. Even as practices changed and older customs were replaced with church-led celebrations, the essence of harvest has remained the same, reminding us of our ancestors' resilience and the timeless bond between people and the earth that sustains them.

CAROLINE ROOPE works in the heritage sector and writes about social history. Her latest book is *The Real DH Lawrence* (Pen & Sword, 2024)

Resources

Take your research further

MUSEUMS

Museum of English Rural Life

a **University of Reading, 6 Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5EX**
t 0118 378 8660
e *merl@reading.ac.uk*
w **merl.reading.ac.uk**

MERL is devoted to the history of the countryside and its people. You can visit in person, or explore collections online. The museum holds extensive archives as well.

Rural Life Living Museum

a **Reeds Road, Tilford, Farnham GU10 2DL**
t 01252 795571
e *info@rural-life.org.uk*
w **rural-life.org.uk**

This open-air museum has a collection of relocated historic buildings, as well as agricultural implements and other artefacts. Its summer season concludes at the end of September, after which it is shut until January.

WEBSITES

British Newspaper Archive

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

The archive is a rich source of harvest-related articles from the late 18th century through to more recent times, from reports on the success of the harvest, to weather predictions and coverage of harvest-home celebrations. The newspapers can be searched by region to discover area-specific customs and traditions.

British Pathé

w **britishpathe.com**

Here you can watch short films related to the harvest including footage from the fields, as well as festivities at the end of the season. Highlights include *All Is Safely Gathered In* (1932) shot in the cornfields of the Sussex Downs (**tinyurl.com/bp-all-safely**), and *East Brent Holds Harvest Festival* (1935), about a Somerset village (**tinyurl.com/bp-brent-fest**).

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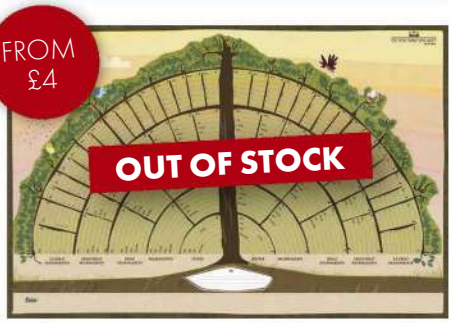

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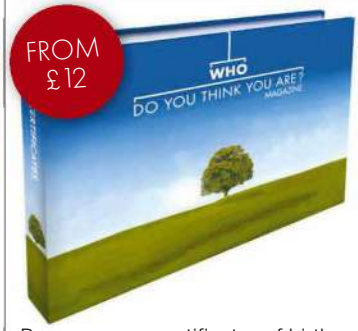

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'An Affidavit Sparked A Search For My Father'

Tina Pentney discovered her biological father's name by chance in 1988, and her journey to find him led her to a half-sister, new 'cousins' – and medieval kings. Interview by **Gail Dixon**

For many years, my existence was a true case of "Who do you think you are?" I was born in 1952, and grew up thinking that my mum's first husband was my father. His surname was Cassidy.

Mum died in 1988, and I found an affidavit among her papers that named my biological father as W Trevor Ainslie. I was astonished and saddened at this discovery, because it meant that dear Nana Cassidy was not my grandmother.

TINA PENTNEY lives in Painswick, Gloucestershire, and is an artist and a retired calligrapher

Who was W Trevor Ainslie, and was he still alive?

For years, I searched through phone books trying to find my father. On discovering that Ainslie was a Scottish Borders name, my husband Jim and I visited the region searching for clues. It was all to no avail, and every day for 16 years I wondered if I'd ever manage to find my dad.

My Eureka Moment

A breakthrough came in 2004 after watching an episode of the BBC One documentary series *Panorama*. It was entitled *Britain's Missing Dads*, and details of a helpline were given at the end. I rang the number, and the researcher told me that there was a website dedicated to the family name Ainslie (**ainslie.org.uk**). On the site, I found Trevor's name and date of birth, which corresponded with a crossed-out birthday in Mum's address book.

I contacted the owner of the site Marilyn Ainslie, and she put me in touch with its co-creator Anthony Ainslie. I was thrilled to discover that Anthony was my second cousin, which was verified by his research. He had spent considerable time with his paternal grandfather Claude visiting archives and photographing ancestral documents and portraits.

Although Anthony had never met Trevor, he found a marriage certificate for him from 1956 and contacted his wife, who provided background details. Trevor had three children with her.

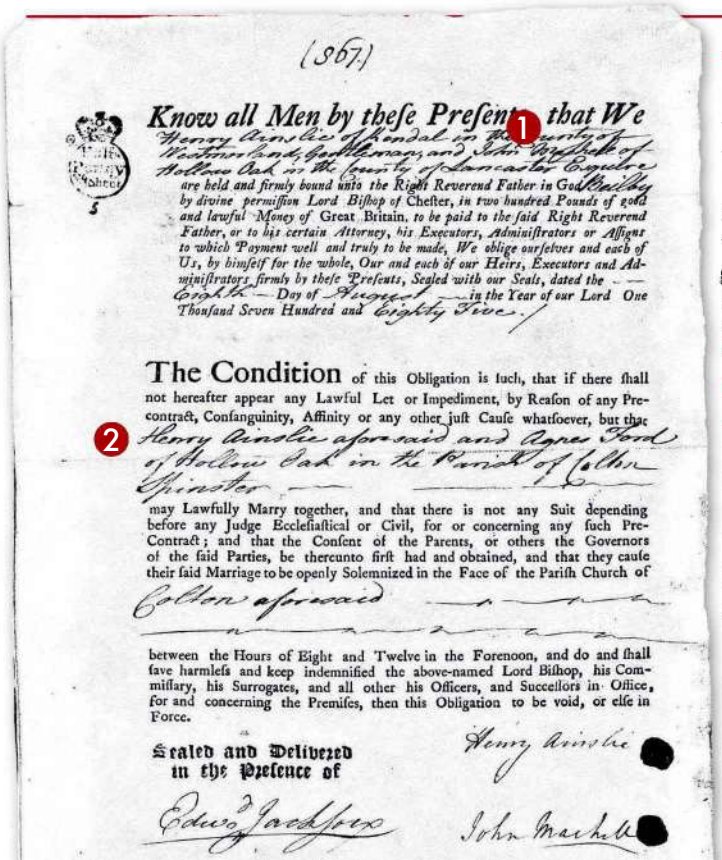
In August 2004, I met Anthony in Dorset and he happily shared his three-volume research into the Ainslie family. I will be forever grateful to him for his enthusiasm, knowledge and warm welcome into the family.

Anthony revealed that Trevor was born in Middlesex in 1921. He had a tough life – his father Captain Gerald Ainslie deserted his mother Wilhelmina, and left her with three children to raise.

Trevor became an engineer, and met Mum when they were

Marriage Bond, 1785

This document proved the identities of Tina's 3x great grandparents



(367)

Know all Men by these Presents that We Henry Ainslie of Kendal in the County of Westmorland, Gentleman, and John Machell of Hollins Hall in the County of Lancaster Esquire are held and firmly bound unto the Right Reverend Father in God Beilby by divine permission Lord Bishop of Chester, in two hundred Pounds of good and lawful Money of Great Britain, to be paid to the said Right Reverend Father, or to his certain Attorney, his Executors, Administrators or Assigns to which Payment well and truly to be made, We oblige ourselves and each of Us, by himself for the whole, Our and each of our Heirs, Executors and Administrators firmly by these Presents, Sealed with our Seals, dated the Eighth Day of August in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty Five.

The Condition of this Obligation is such, that if there shall not hereafter appear any Lawful Let or Impediment, by Reason of any Pre-contract, Consanguinity, Affinity or any other just Cause whatsoever, but that Henry Ainslie aforesaid and Agnes Ford of Hollins Hall in the Parish of Colton Spinster may Lawfully Marry together, and that there is not any Suit depending before any Judge Ecclesiastical or Civil, for or concerning any such Pre-Contract; and that the Consent of the Parents, or others the Governors of the said Parties, be thereunto first had and obtained, and that they cause their said Marriage to be openly Solemnized in the Face of the Parish Church of Colton aforesaid between the Hours of Eight and Twelve in the Forenoon, and do and shall save harmless and keep indemnified the above-named Lord Bishop, his Commissary, his Surrogates, and all other his Officers, and Successors in Office, for and concerning the Premises, then this Obligation to be void, or else in Force.

Sealed and Delivered in the Presence of Edwd Jackson

Henry Ainslie

John Machell

1 John Machill
A marriage bond was a legal document that allowed a licence to be issued, and meant that there was no need to publish banns. The guarantor Machill may have been a relative of the groom or the bride.

2 Henry Ainslie
The groom is named here, as well as the bride: Agnes Ford. If the couple's claims about the legality of their marriage were false, a forfeit of £200 (equivalent to about £27,200 today) had to be paid to the Church.

both working at an aeroplane-engineering company near Gloucester. He died in 1980 while living in Manchester.

A New Half-Sister

Anthony also revealed that I had an older half-sister called Laine Lawson, who was illegitimate. It was so lovely to discover that I had a half-sibling, because I was Mum's only child.

Laine also grew up without Trevor in her life, although she knew his name. She found him in the 1970s, and flew from her home in Australia to the UK where she spent time with him and his family.

Laine and I took a DNA test in October 2005, which gave a 99.99 per cent probability of us being half-siblings.

Unfortunately I haven't met her because she lives so far away, but we speak on the phone and have corresponded for 20 years.

Anthony's Ainslie tree went back to the 13th century, and included fascinating relatives from modern times. Trevor's Victorian grandfather Aymer Ainslie was a wealthy ironmaster who lived in Cambridge, and kept a house full of servants.

Aymer's father was the scholarly Rev. Dr Gilbert Ainslie who was born in Kendal, Westmorland, and became master of Pembroke College, University of Cambridge. His parents were Dr Henry Ainslie and ironworks heiress Agnes Ford, both of whom came from the north-west of England.

Anthony left Agnes' line for me to explore, so I began delving into her past. She has become an inspiration to me.

Researching Agnes

Agnes was born in 1762 and inherited land around Grizedale, near Kendal. She must have been deeply in touch with nature, because she commissioned the planting of 70,000 trees which developed into the renowned beauty spot of Grizedale Forest.

Agnes' 4x great grandfather was William le Fleming of Rydal Hall, Westmorland. Biographies and archived documents traced his line back to Anglo-Norman earls and the Plantagenet kings. This means I'm descended from William the Conqueror.

One of Agnes' ancestors who I feel close to is Miles FitzWalter of Gloucester, a baron whose grandfather built the first Gloucester Castle in the 11th century. Miles fought during the Anarchy, a 12th-century civil war for the throne of England. Initially, he supported King Stephen before switching allegiance to Empress Matilda, who bestowed the title Earl of Hereford on him.

Miles was killed in 1143 by a 'stray' arrow while out hunting on Christmas Eve. I live near Gloucester and attend a history group at Llanthony Secunda Priory (**llanthonysecunda.org/llanthony-history-huddle**), which Miles established. I gave a talk on his life there in 2024.

My ultimate eureka moment has been going from knowing nothing about my paternal side, to knowing everything. I still get a thrill from the realisation today.

A portrait of Rev. Dr Gilbert Ainslie, Tina's great great grandfather, by painter Frederick Bacon Barwell

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Reader Tips

What recommendations does Tina have for other researchers?

- Always explore wives' ancestry. Sometimes younger sons of barons and earls made advantageous marriages.
- Contact the local-history society where your ancestors lived – their members can be a gold mine of information.
- If you can't find a marriage certificate, consider the possibility that couples who had children were not yet married.

AROUND BRITAIN

Essex

Jonathan Scott shares the latest updates from Essex Record Office

When you're ready to dig into your Essex roots, there are many museums and local-history collections that may contain traces of your ancestors' lives. The Museum of Chelmsford (**chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/**), for example, looks after artefacts relating to the county regiment from the formation of the 44th (East Essex) Regiment of Foot in 1741 through to amalgamation into the East Anglian Regiment in 1958.

Unique items here include the prosthetic limb worn by Colchester local Russell Walker Byford, who lost his left arm in France in 1916, and despite the loss would go on to play football for both Colchester Town and Coggeshall Town. There's also a banjo owned by Harold Mugford from Chelmsford, who, while serving with the Essex Yeomanry in 1917, was awarded the Victoria Cross for keeping his gun position at Monchy-le-Preux, despite two broken legs and other wounds.

St Mary the Virgin Parish Church in Chelmsford became a cathedral in 1914

Engineer Guglielmo Marconi opened his first factory in Chelmsford in 1898

The museum also holds artefacts, documents and ephemera from the 'Big Three' local employers: Marconi, the Hoffmann Manufacturing Company (which made ball bearings) and engineering firm Crompton and Co. (see the 'Local Industry' box). Italian electrical engineer Guglielmo Marconi (1874–1937) opened his first factory in Hall Street, Chelmsford, in 1898. The historic Marconi Collection, which charts the birth of wireless communication and documents the first radio transmissions, is today split between the Bodleian Library (**www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/home**) and the History of Science Museum (**hsm.ox.ac.uk**), both of them located in Oxford.

Essex Record Office (ERO; **essexrecordoffice.co.uk**), which is located in Chelmsford too, has letters of application for roles at the Hoffmann Manufacturing Company (1897–1903), which you can explore via its catalogue Essex Archives Online (EAO):

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Free Online Records

Directories, parish registers, MIs, Bishops' Transcripts and a Victoria County History

Bishops' Transcripts

w **tinyurl.com/fs-essex-bts**

FamilySearch has an unindexed collection of images of baptism, marriage and burial records from Essex (1779–1892). There are also parish register indexes at **tinyurl.com/fs-essex-reg**.

Memorial Inscriptions

w **records.wffhs.org.uk**

You can search memorial inscriptions, and other records, transcribed by Waltham Forest Family History Society here.

Parish Registers

w **freereg.org.uk**

FreeREG provides useful indexes to 3.26 million parish registers from Essex.

Trade Directories

w **tinyurl.com/special-essex**

Explore Kelly's directories for 1874, 1882, 1894, 1902 and 1914 via the University of Leicester's Special Collections Online.

Victoria County History

w **tinyurl.com/vch-essex**

At British History Online you can browse the Essex volumes of this encyclopaedia. For details of the latest volumes, visit **tinyurl.com/ihr-vch-ess**.

essexarchivesonline.co.uk/ViewCatalogue.aspx?ID=90442. And three years ago ERO also ran a project to record the reminiscences of former Marconi staff, resulting in the site Marconi Stories (**marconi-stories.org**). Here you can browse oral history recordings and images from the Marconi Photographic Unit.

Information-Rich Blog

Archival blogs can be rather barren, indifferent places to visit. This isn't the case with ERO's (**essexrecordofficeblog.co.uk**), which has been going strong since 2012 and is an excellent place to find out what's happening behind the scenes, and read in-depth articles on potential sources.

For example, a recent post describes ERO's vast collection of settlement papers. These were issued to individuals or families as proof of their right to legal settlement in a parish. At the same time they confirmed that the parish would be liable to provide poor relief, should the individual or family fall on hard times. The system also left behind removal orders and settlement examinations. The examinations are sworn testimonies that can hold all sorts of genealogical information, plus employment/apprenticeship history, and details of any property or land that was owned, rented or leased.

The manufacture of insulating cones at Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Works in Chelmsford, c1910

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The article was written by David Perkins, who last year catalogued papers for Rayleigh and Hadleigh as part of a placement for his MA in history at the University of Essex. David writes: "Ranging from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteen century, settlement papers offer unique details and a window into the lived reality of the common person who is otherwise lost to history."

This work is part of an ongoing drive to create ever more detailed catalogues of parish-settlement papers. Staff are currently in the process of adding the new indexes to EAO. Meanwhile this year's student placement is working on indexes to alien registration cards over 100 years old, which will be added to the site in due course.

Digitised Parish Registers

In fact for anyone who is tracing ancestors in Essex or surrounding areas, EAO is an invaluable resource, not least because many of the records in the catalogue ▶

can be accessed digitally via ERO's subscription service. The backbone of the site is the parish register collection, which includes most baptisms, marriages and burials from about 400 Church of England parishes. Very recent records (baptisms less than 16 years old and marriages after 1957) are excluded, but most parishes have registers from the 17th or 18th century onwards, and some go back to 1538. You will also find material here from the Greater London boroughs that were once part of Essex.

Although the website does not have an index to the registers, four are on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) via 'Essex, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538–1812', 'Births and Baptisms, 1813–1921', 'Marriages, 1754–1937' and 'Deaths and Burials, 1813–1996'. There are also free indexes available from the likes of FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) and FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**).

Nearly all pre-1858 original wills held here have also been indexed and digitised on EAO. These total about 175,000 images, and include examples from eastern Hertfordshire and occasional entries from London and neighbouring counties.

At 1.34 miles long, the pier in Southend-on-Sea, seen here in 1896, is the longest one in the world

Electoral Registers

Electoral registers are another highlight, with 21,000 images for 1833–1883 (though incomplete), including a consistent set sandwiched between the 1832 Representation of the People Act and the 1867 Representation of the People Act, also known as the First and Second Reform Acts. All post-1867 registers are being added in sequence.

Staff have also published images from 1918 (the first year to include all men aged 21 or over, plus women 30 or over subject to a property qualification) and 1929 (the first to include all women 21 or over). However, there are still gaps to watch out for. The 1918 and 1929 registers exclude Southend, for example, as well as parts of Greater London.

All these resources have been produced using high-resolution colour scans taken directly from original documents. The majority require a subscription, with prices ranging from one day (costing £21) to one year (£105). However, you can use the site for free via ERO's searchroom and access points in Saffron Walden, Harlow and Southend-on-Sea.

You might ask why ERO doesn't sell images of its records to one of the commercial sites instead, such as Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) or indeed Ancestry. The explanation given on the FAQs web page is, "By using our own system, we keep control of the images of records entrusted to us; we stay in direct contact with our users; and we retain all the income for Essex County Council (less a small charge that we have to pay for each financial transaction). This helps to keep the Record Office on a sound financial footing, limiting its cost to Essex taxpayers."

Finally, the Essex Society for Family History (**esfh.org.uk**) runs branches in Chelmsford, Colchester, Harlow and Southend-on-Sea, and has compiled a huge database that includes both transcriptions of parish registers and memorial transcriptions, as well as an index to Poor Law records. Meanwhile the Friends of Historic Essex (**friendsofhistoricessex.org**) turned 70 last year, and is working on *The Essex Record Office in 70 Documents*. The booklet will feature 70 people associated with ERO writing about a document that means something to them.

TOP TIP!

Essex Archives Online (**essexarchivesonline.co.uk**) has parish registers from Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, as the five London boroughs used to be in Essex.

LOCAL INDUSTRY

Crompton And Co.

Did your relation work for this engineering firm?

Electrical engineer REB Crompton *(left)*, photographed c1925

The Anchor Works in Chelmsford was purchased by one Colonel Rookes Evelyn Bell Crompton in 1878. The company would go on to pioneer electric lighting, power stations and become one of the first large-scale manufacturers of electrical equipment, producing dynamos, circuit-breakers, motors, meters and lamps. Archival material is at ERO (**essexrecordoffice.co.uk**) and London's Science Museum (**sciencemuseum.org.uk**), while the Museum of Chelmsford (**chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/**) has artefacts on display.

GETTY IMAGES

DIRECTORY

ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

Essex Record Office

a **Wharf Road, Chelmsford CM2 6YT**
t 033301 32500
e *ero.enquiry@essex.gov.uk*
w **essexrecordoffice.co.uk**

You'll find parish registers, census material, wills, Poor Law records, family and estate records, and newspapers at ERO. You can sign up for the subscription service via the catalogue Essex Archives Online (**essexarchivesonline.co.uk**), or you can use it for free via the access points located at Harlow Museum, Saffron Walden Library, and the library at The Forum Southend-on-Sea.

Colchester Library

a **Trinity Square, Colchester CO1 1JB**
t 0345 603 7628
e *colchester.library@essex.gov.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/colchester-lib**

The library is currently closed for refurbishment, but is due to reopen in autumn this year.

Grays Library

a **Thameside Complex, Orsett Road, Grays RM17 5DX**
t 01375 413976
e *grays.library@thurrock.gov.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/thurrock-local**

Thurrock's local-history collection is located on the first floor. Alongside books, maps, illustrations and photographs, you can access microfilmed editions of local newspaper the *Thurrock Gazette* back to 1886.

Metropolitan Essex

There are several borough collections for areas of historic Essex that now form part of Greater London. These include Barking and Dagenham's archives at Valence House in Dagenham (**valencehousecollections.co.uk**), as well as Havering's archives preserved at the Central Library in Romford (**libraries.havering.gov.uk/digital-content/local-studies**), Newham's at Stratford Library (**newham.gov.uk/libraries-arts-culture/local-history-archives**), Redbridge's at Redbridge Central Library in Ilford (**visionrcl.org.uk/centre/redbridge-heritage-centre/**) and Waltham Forest's at Chingford Assembly Hall (**walthamforest.gov.uk/libraries-arts-parks-and-leisure/arts-and-culture/waltham-forest-archives-and-local-studies-library**).

The Forum Southend-on-Sea

a **Elmer Square, Southend-on-Sea SS1 1NS**
t 01702 534111
e *library@southend.gov.uk*
w **theforumsouthend.co.uk/library/**

At Southend's main library you can access both Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and Essex Archives Online for free.

GROUPS & SOCIETIES

East Of London Family History Society

w **eolfhs.org.uk**

The family history society covers parts of historic Essex that are now in Greater London: Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

Essex Society For Family History

w **esfh.org.uk**

The society has branches in Chelmsford, Colchester, Harlow and Southend-on-Sea, and a research centre at ERO.

Friends Of Historic Essex

w **friendsofhistoricessex.org**

The charity has supported ERO and Essex research since 1954.

Waltham Forest Family History Society

w **wffhs.org.uk**

The society meets at Spruce Hill Baptist Church Hall in Walthamstow, and online.

MUSEUMS

Essex Police Museum

a **Essex Police Headquarters, Springfield, Chelmsford CM2 6DN**
t 01245 457150
w **tinyurl.com/essex-pol-mus**

Here you'll find records of service back to the 1840s, containing details of rank, location of service, training, pay, commendations, misconduct, sickness and the reason for leaving.

Harlow Museum

a **Muskham Road, Harlow CM20 2LF**
t 01279 446222
e *harlow.museum@harlow.gov.uk*
w **harlowmuseum.com**

At the museum's library and research room you can view town plans, photographs, parish registers, newspapers and books. It's also one of the free access points for Essex Archives Online.

Museum Of Chelmsford

a **Oaklands Park, Moulsham Street, Chelmsford CM2 9AQ**
t 01245 605700
w **chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/**

Alongside artefacts from Marconi, the Hoffmann Manufacturing Company and Crompton and Co., you can find the Essex Regiment Museum collection.

Southend Museums

w **southendmuseums.co.uk**

Get the latest news from Southend attractions including the Central Museum.

WEBSITES

Ancestry

w **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61698/**

Ancestry's parish records indexes include baptisms, marriages and burials (1538–1812).

Findmypast

w **findmypast.co.uk/articles/essex-parish-lists**

Findmypast includes five million transcribed records from the county's parishes.

A logbook from the *Cutty Sark*, 1872

Jennifer Lightbody shares a fascinating logbook held by West Dunbartonshire Council Archives Interview By Rosemary Collins

One of the most romantic names from the Age of Sail is the *Cutty Sark*, the 19th-century British tea clipper that sailed across the world. The ship is now a museum in Greenwich, South-East London, but West Dunbartonshire Council Archives in Scotland holds a collection of papers donated by its first captain, including a logbook from an 1872 voyage. Archivist Jennifer Lightbody tells us more about the logbook, and what it shows about life for sailors on the high seas.

What Is The Logbook?

It is the extract log of the *Cutty Sark*, for its journey from Shanghai to London in 1872. An extract log was, as the name suggests, an extract from the comprehensive ship's log, and it recorded weather conditions, ship's heading, and occurrences such as the sighting of other vessels, incidents such as damage to the vessel, and places that were passed or visited en route. The official logs are held by the Caird Library at Royal Museums Greenwich (**rmg.co.uk/collections/caird-library**).

The clipper was built in 1869 in Dumbarton by shipbuilder Scott & Linton for John Willis & Sons, although the build was finished by William Denny and Brothers when Scott & Linton went into liquidation. The *Cutty Sark* was one of the fastest ships of its day and one of the last tea clippers built, following the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 which shortened the route for any vessels carrying tea from China.

What Dates Does The Logbook Cover?

It covers 17 June 1872 to 16 October 1872, when the ship sailed from Shanghai to London racing the *Thermopylae*, another clipper, in the 'Great Tea Race'. Due to rudder damage suffered during the voyage, and the subsequent delay to carry out repairs, the *Cutty Sark* lost, taking 122 days to reach London compared with the *Thermopylae*'s 115 days.

The logbook provides insight into the day-to-day activities of a famous vessel

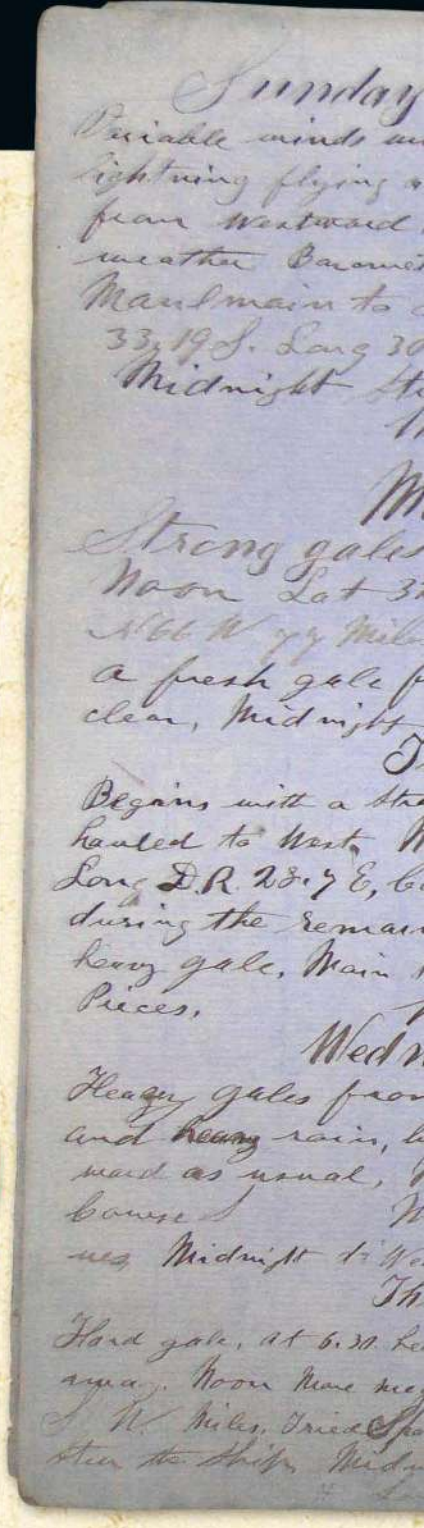
Why Did You Choose It?

I chose the logbook because it provides great insight into the day-to-day activities of such a famous vessel, and records the crew's ingenuity in tackling the ambitious task of building and fitting a 'jury' (temporary makeshift) rudder under challenging conditions while the ship was at sea.

I also like the fact that the events that were captured as part of an everyday activity became part of history, determining the outcome of the two vessels' rivalry.

What Does It Show About The Tea Clipper?

It records the journey of the *Cutty Sark*, detailing locations it passed on the voyage to London, including Wusong (formerly Woosung) and the Amherst Rocks near Shanghai, and Saint Helena, and vessels sighted en route, including the *Thermopylae*.



It also details the weather conditions, which were crucial to a sailed vessel.

Perhaps most importantly, for this specific voyage, the logbook describes the damage caused to the rudder and its repair. A "Heavy Sea Struck [the] Rudder & knocked it away". The crew "Tried [a] Spar over the Stern, but [it] would not steer the Ship". Two days later the crew were "constructing [a] Jury Rudder & Stern-Post as fast as Possible", and they were "shipped" (attached) three days after that, so the clipper could resume sailing.

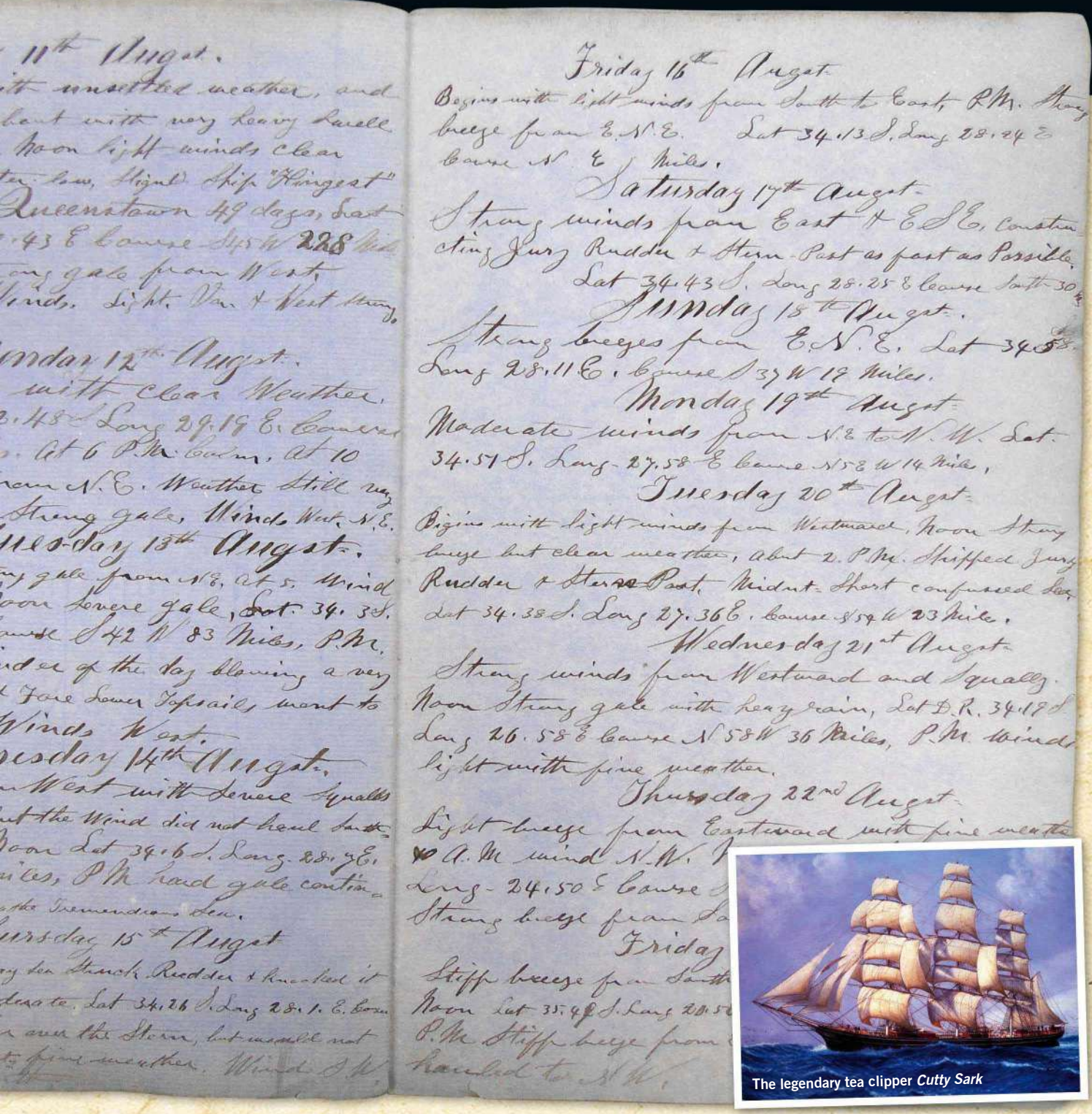
Visit Us

Dumbarton Heritage Centre

a Dumbarton Library, Strathleven Place, Dumbarton G82 1BD
t 01389 608965
e *archives@west-dunbarton.gov.uk*
w **west-dunbarton.gov.uk/libraries/archives-family-history/dumbarton-heritage-centre/**

The centre is open Monday to Saturday (the hours depend on the day of the week). Local-studies material can be accessed on a drop-in visit. For archives material, book in advance by email.

GETTY IMAGES



How Did It End Up In Your Collection?

The logbook is part of a collection that was donated to Dumbarton Public Library by George Moodie (1829–1923) in May 1922. Moodie was a mariner who supervised the construction of the *Cutty Sark*, and was captain on its first three voyages. The collection contains three abstract logbooks covering 1870–1872, including that for the maiden voyage from London to Shanghai in 1870; the Memorandum of Agreement between John Willis & Sons and Scott & Linton from 1869; correspondence relating to the gift of the logbooks to the library; and a catalogue of sale of plant and machinery from Scott & Linton's yard in 1870.

What Other Documents Do You Hold?

We preserve the records from West Dunbartonshire Council and its predecessor authorities. This area covers large industrial towns such as Clydebank and Dumbarton, both with strong shipbuilding heritage, and the towns of the Vale of Leven with its printworks and textile-dyeing industries. Clydebank is also known for the Singer Manufacturing Company – our collection of the firm's famous sewing machines and the associated archive are recognised as nationally significant by Museums Galleries Scotland.

Our local-authority holdings include records such as charters regarding the creation of the Royal Burgh of Dumbarton, minutes from council meetings, school-admission registers, police and court records, financial records, and Dean of Guild drawings from building-planning applications.

We also hold a wide range of church records, including baptism, marriage and burial registers, plus Poor Law registers, many of which are on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**).

Other local firms whose archives we preserve include Polaroid, William Denny and Brothers and fellow shipbuilder John Brown, and Dixon's Glassworks. Finally there are records of clubs, incorporations and associations, and family papers. Our catalogue is at **adlib.west-dunbarton.gov.uk.**

REVIEWS

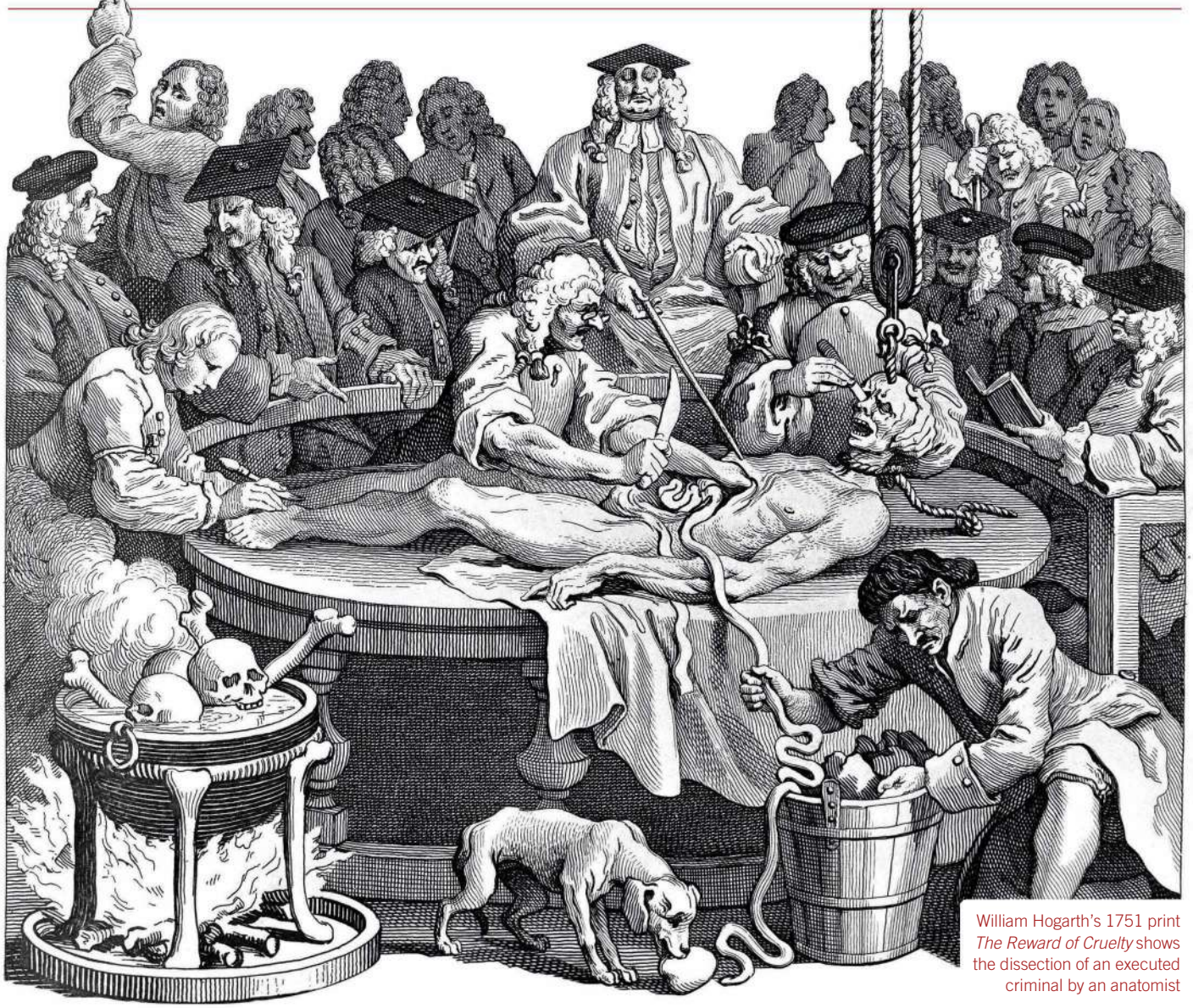
The latest books on history and genealogy, plus apps, podcasts and websites

No Ordinary Deaths

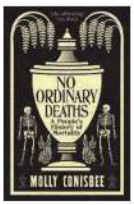
A People's History of Mortality

SOCIAL HISTORY

Molly Conisbee
Wellcome, 368 pages, £22



William Hogarth's 1751 print *The Reward of Cruelty* shows the dissection of an executed criminal by an anatomist



No Ordinary Deaths is impressively wide-ranging in scope, and distils centuries of history in a very readable manner thanks to author Molly Conisbee's succinct and accessible style. She is not just a social historian but also a bereavement counsellor, which brings a valuable extra dimension to her writing.

She takes a thematic approach, using real case studies to explore topics such as grief; funerals and mourning; wakes; beliefs about the afterlife; memorials; and gravestones. She also addresses subjects that affected a smaller proportion of the population, such as dissection and anatomisation and how these were used as criminal deterrents. Notably, she gives voice to those marginalised by society, from unbaptised children to members of the LGBTQ+ community, whose stories are frequently overlooked.

Importantly, Conisbee reflects on how death affected (and continues to affect) the living. Family historians will find particularly useful sections on burial clubs, preparation for death, and the care of the body.

What I appreciated most was the author's perspective on grief and how she connects the history of death with our modern experience. She raises the vital point that many of us are unprepared for death. I especially enjoyed her section on the distinct approach to death taken by nonconformists, a topic rarely covered in similar works.

Although not written specifically for family historians, this is an insightful and thought-provoking book that sheds light on how our forebears died. It's a valuable addition to your bookshelf if you're keen to understand what life and death was really like for your ancestors through the ages.

Celia Heritage is a genealogist, therapist and the author of *Cemeteries and Graveyards: A Guide for Local and Family Historians in England and Wales* (Pen & Sword, 2022)

WELLCOME COLLECTION.

DIGITAL PICKS

Rosemary Collins highlights three digital resources that caught our eye this month

RADIO

History's Heroes

tinyurl.com/bbc-snds-hh (UK only) or bbc.com

Following on from *History's Secret Heroes* and *History's Youngest Heroes*, this new series from BBC Radio 4 sees historian Alex von Tunzelmann celebrate more inspirational figures. They include film star Katharine Hepburn, author Hans Christian Andersen and Harold Gillies, who pioneered plastic surgery to help servicemen wounded in the First World War. Free.

VIDEO

Forgotten Lines

youtube.com/@ForgottenLinesPodcast/videos

James Doherty's YouTube channel has a US focus, but features stories that family historians around the world will find compelling. In each short video, Doherty explains how he solved a genealogical mystery, including identifying people in old photos, and tracing the woman a street was named after. Free.

EXHIBITION

Prisoners Or Patients? Criminal Insanity In Victorian Scotland

tinyurl.com/nrs-pop

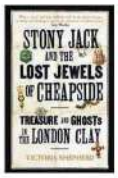
This online exhibition from the National Records of Scotland tells the stories of nine offenders admitted to the Criminal Lunatic Department at Perth Prison between 1857 and 1887. The stories are harrowing – they include four women who murdered their own children – but provide a fascinating insight into Victorian Scotland. Free.

Stony Jack And The Lost Jewels Of Cheapside

Treasure And Ghosts In The London Clay

HISTORY OF LONDON

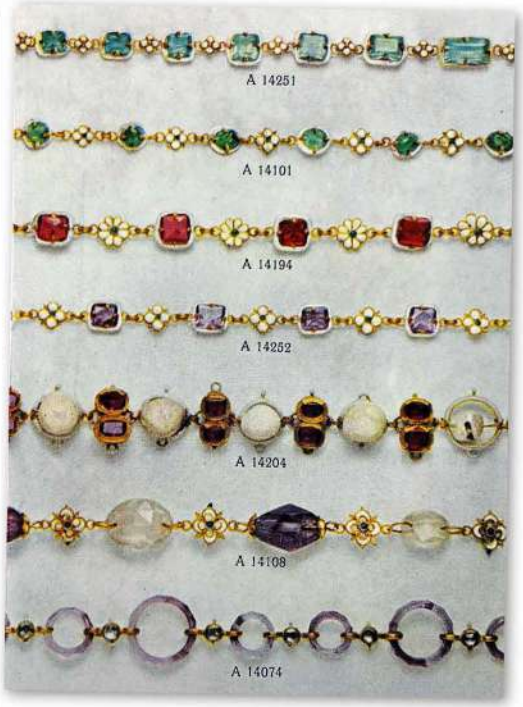
Victoria Shepherd *Oneworld, 400 pages, £20*



In a cellar in Cheapside in the City of London in 1912, navvies excavating the site literally struck gold. Under layers of clay dating to the Elizabethan and Jacobean city, they hit upon a hoard of jewellery.

They secreted the ancient gems out, and sold them to an antiques dealer known as Stony Jack. Jack's real name was George Lawrence and, as well as his shop in Wandsworth, he held the post of director of excavations at the London Museum in Kensington Palace, which is where the hoard ended up. It consisted of several hundred rings, brooches, amulets and chains which were probably a jeweller's working collection, stashed in the basement of a road famous for its goldsmiths' shops.

The straightforward story of the find and its acquisition by the museum is enriched by many diversions into everyday life. Victoria Shepherd writes in a discursive style giving details of work, transport and entertainment in the early 20th century that will be of interest to family historians, not least passages about the recently introduced biscuit the custard cream, and milk reaching the "criminally high price" of 1s a pint.



A selection of chains from the Cheapside Hoard

THE CHEAPSIDE HOARD OF ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN JEWELLERY (1928)

Jad Adams is a historian and author whose books include *Decadent Women* (Reaktion, 2023), discussing the female contributors to the *fin-de-siècle* journal *The Yellow Book*

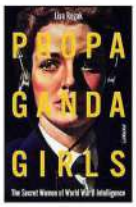
Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

Propaganda Girls The Secret Women Of World War II Intelligence

WW2

Lisa Rogak

Footnote, 240 pages, £16.99



This is the story of four women who, during the Second World War, were recruited by Colonel William Donovan, director of US intelligence agency the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Jane Smith-Hutton, the actor Marlene Dietrich, Zuzka Lauwers and Betty MacDonald came from different walks of life, but all had skills that Donovan utilised in the propaganda campaign against Germany and Japan. They forged letters and military orders, distributed fake newspapers and, in Berlin-born Dietrich's case, recorded propaganda songs in her native tongue that were broadcast in Germany. Their shared aim was to demoralise enemy soldiers by making them think that they were on the losing side.

The four women's interwoven journeys give the reader an insight into how they proved themselves in a male-dominated world, and were a valuable asset in the fight against fascism. My dad was in Burma with the Eighth Army during the war, so I found their work aimed at Japanese troops particularly interesting. It also gave me a new insight into the US side of the war.

All in all, it's a very informative book about this once secret world.

Shirley Moth, Eastbourne

Shirley started researching her family history after her father's death

Join Us... Send us an email if you'd like to join our reviewing panel e *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

TV & RADIO

Rosemary Collins previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

Rob And Rylan's Passage To India

BBC Two and BBC iPlayer
September

Rylan and Rob attend Diwali celebrations at Jaipur's City Palace

Last year, barrister, presenter, author and former *WDYTYA?* star Rob Rinder teamed up with DJ and presenter Rylan for *Rob and Rylan's Grand Tour*. The series, which saw the two retrace the 'Grand Tour' to Italy taken by British aristocrats in the 18th and 19th centuries, proved to be a hit, even winning a BAFTA. The dynamic duo are now reuniting to travel further afield – drawn, like millions before them, to the unique history and culture of India.

In 1912 writer EM Forster – Rob's literary hero – journeyed to the subcontinent. The result was *A Passage to India* (1924), a classic novel that captured the country at the beginning of the decline of the British Raj. In their new adventure, the two retrace Forster's footsteps to see how India's history is reflected in its art and culture.

Rob's effort to inspire Rylan to love India as much as he does starts on an uncertain footing. "You could have put me on the M25 at five o'clock, 'cause all I'm in is a traffic jam," the DJ complains as the pair travel by rickshaw through Delhi's streets.

The exasperation runs both ways, as well. Rob says that Rylan makes him feel "like the benevolent headmistress of a school for excluded children".

But they soon discover that there's more to the city than crowds and motor chaos. They begin by visiting the tomb of the 16th-century emperor Humayun. Humayun was a Muslim who ruled peacefully over a predominantly Hindu population. The tomb's beautiful Persian-influenced architecture later inspired the Taj Mahal.

Meanwhile, the India Gate stands as a memorial to the Indian soldiers who died fighting for Britain in the First World War and the Third Anglo-Afghan War (1919). It's an eye-catching monument to Britain's colonial rule of India. However, Indians today say they're proud of it.

Rob and Rylan also learn more about modern India from the reality TV star Shalini Passi, rapper and activist Naveen Kumar, and openly gay politician Anish Gawande.

Queen Victoria: Secret Marriage Secret Child?

Channel 4
Streaming now

There's more Rob Rinder in this documentary, where he teams up with historian Dr Fern Riddell to investigate her astonishing new theory. Queen Victoria's close relationship to her servant John Brown is well known. But did the two marry in secret – and even have a child together? Fern digs out the secret evidence that could prove it, including a diary entry dealing a deathbed confession from a chaplain that he married the couple. Most sensationally, they meet an American woman whose family have always carried the story that they're descended from Victoria and Brown's child.

VJ Day 80: We Were There

BBC iPlayer
Streaming now

This documentary, released to mark the 80th anniversary of VJ Day, gathers together first-hand accounts from the last survivors of the often-overlooked Second World War in the Far East. Presenter Rachel Burden traces their stories, from the invasion of British Malaya to the horror of Hiroshima and Japan's surrender, and talks to a woman who was imprisoned in Singapore as a child, former prisoners of war who worked on the Burma Railroad, and servicemen who had fought in Europe but were then deployed to Asia in the war's final months.

Long Lost Family

ITV and ITVX
September

The latest series of ITV's family history programme is due this month. Once again, presenters Davina McCall and Nicky Campbell will meet ordinary people trying to solve family mysteries and connect with long-lost relatives thanks to DNA testing. Also streaming now on ITVX is a new *Long Lost Family* special focusing on the UK's Mother and Baby Homes, where unmarried pregnant women were placed in the 20th century before their children were adopted.

Davina McCall and Nicky Campbell return to present *Long Lost Family*

Kevin Costner's The West

Sky History
15 September

Kevin Costner recently starred in the hit US TV drama *Yellowstone* about life on a modern-day ranch, but won the Best Picture and Best Director Academy Awards for his revisionist Western *Dances with Wolves* (1990). In this eight-part documentary series he explores the real history of the Old West and how generations of immigrants shaped the country. Topics include lawmen and outlaws, cowboys and ranchers, and trailblazing women.

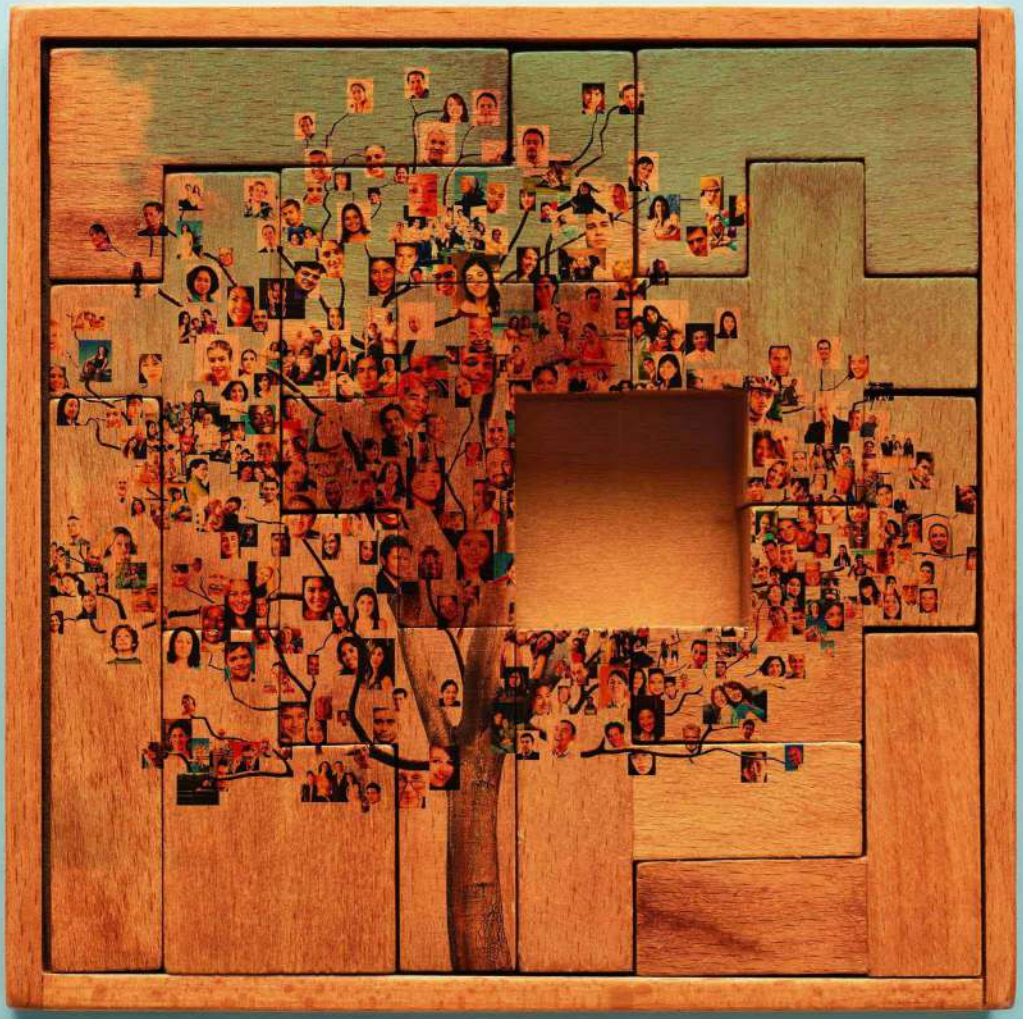
BBC/REX/ZINC | WALL TO WALL/ITV

NEXT MONTH

Our November issue goes on sale on **7 October**

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

How a new approach could help you find your missing family



PLUS

- Life In Nelson's Navy
- The 17th-Century Census
- Cumbrian Records Guide
- Criminal Records Websites

GETTY IMAGES

FAMILY HISTORY & MENTAL HEALTH

The healing power of exploring your roots

'Grandpa Survived Both World Wars'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Nicola Hanefeld's grandfather was a prisoner of war in Siberia during the First World War, then narrowly escaped Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. By **Gail Dixon**

Bruno *(left)* met the Queen Mother when she visited his firm

The door to the past flew open on a spring day in 2004," says Nicola Hanefeld. "Out of the blue, my father Hans-Peter Vogel sent me a Czech passport dated 1935. It belonged to Grete Lanzer, a person I'd never heard of before.

"Daddy had annotated the passport with the words, 'This is my father (Bruno's) sister who was murdered in a concentration camp.' He also wrote that another of Bruno's sisters had been murdered, and his mother-in-law.

"I found my father's message stunning. He was 78 at the time, had terminal cancer and died the following year. As his life was ending, he seemed to be unloading unspoken traumatic facts about our family to the next generation.

"I grew up in England, and remember many happy times spent with our grandparents Bruno and Marianne Vogel at their home in London. They never talked about the past, so receiving the passport inspired me to delve into our family history."

Bruno was born on 16 July 1885, in Jägerndorf in Austria-Hungary, now Krnov in the Czech Republic. His parents Ludwig and Johanna were Jewish, and he had three sisters, Grete, Irma and Else.

After leaving school, Bruno studied mechanical engineering and became best friends with Heinz Gütermann whose family owned the sewing-thread company that is now known as A&E Gütermann. When the First World War broke out, Bruno joined the Austro-Hungarian Army and became a lieutenant in the infantry.

He fought in the Brusilov Offensive in Eastern Europe in 1916, which was one of the deadliest campaigns in history. He was captured by the Russian Army, and imprisoned in Siberia for four years.

After release, Bruno moved to Opava in Czechoslovakia where he established a successful Gütermann branch and became its managing director.

He met Marianne Wilhelm, who was also Jewish, and they married in 1922. Their daughter Eva was born in 1923, and Hans-Peter two years later.

The family's contentment was shattered by the rise of Nazism, and in 1938 Bruno decided that they must flee to London.

His sister Irma also escaped to Britain. However, sadly Grete, Else and Marianne's mother Therese were all trapped in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia.

"Grandpa had to find his business feet in Britain, and start afresh in a country where the language was unfamiliar," Nicola explains. "He was aged 54 and had lost everything, including their lovely home in Opava.

"He succeeded, however, and set up the London firm Perivale Gütermann Ltd which flourished. They even had a visit from Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother."

Bruno didn't confirm the fate of his family until the 1970s, and chose to remain silent. "My grandparents probably didn't want to burden us with the horrors of the Holocaust. Grandpa passed away in 1979 at the age of 94."

Nicola discovered from various archives that Grete was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943, and Else was sent to the Łódź ghetto in Poland and never heard of again. Therese was held in the Theresienstadt camp-ghetto in Prague before being murdered in Treblinka in 1942.

Nicola has paid tribute to her relations by telling their story in her book *The Unspeakable: Breaking My Family's Silence Surrounding the Holocaust*.

"Writing the book has been emotionally draining, but it has resolved my paternal family's unspoken trauma," she reveals.

"Bruno has metamorphosed from 'just' being my much-loved grandfather to a courageous, innovative and intelligent person. I am so proud of how he and Marianne navigated challenges without becoming bitter."

Bruno was 54 and had lost everything, including their lovely home in Opava

NICOLA HANEFELD lives in Freiburg, Germany, and teaches the Alexander Technique, a self-care method

WHO'S YOUR HERO?

Share your family hero with us and they could appear in the magazine!

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